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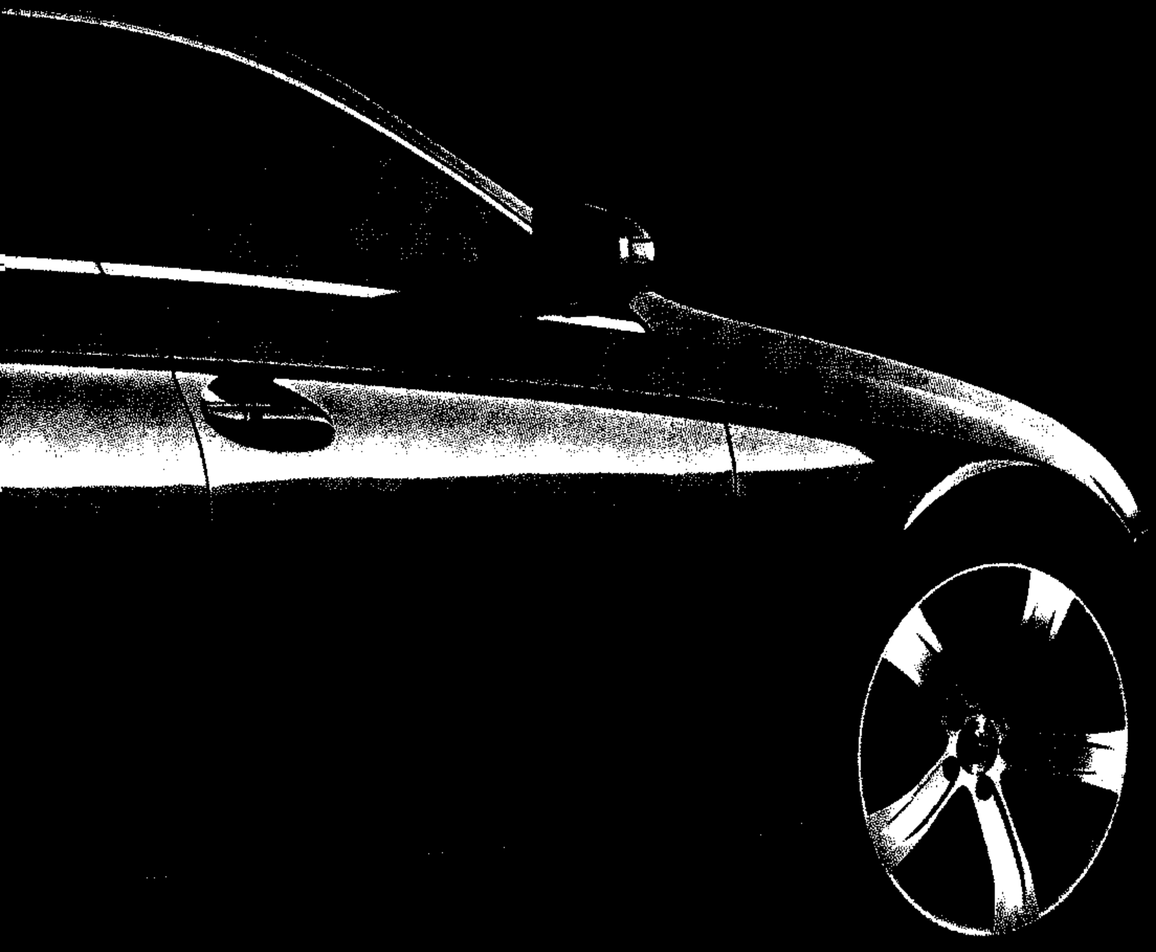

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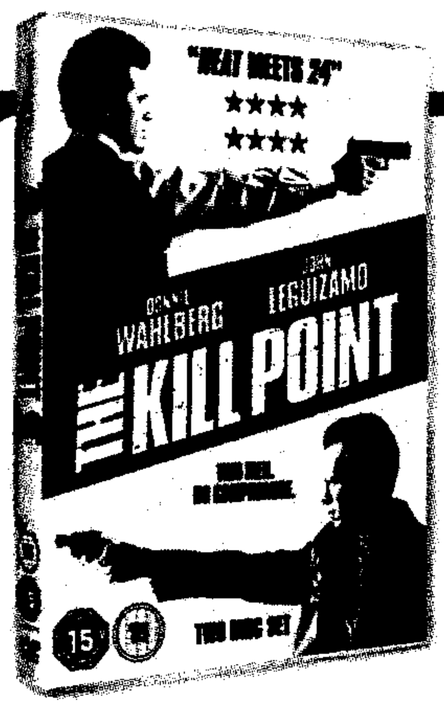

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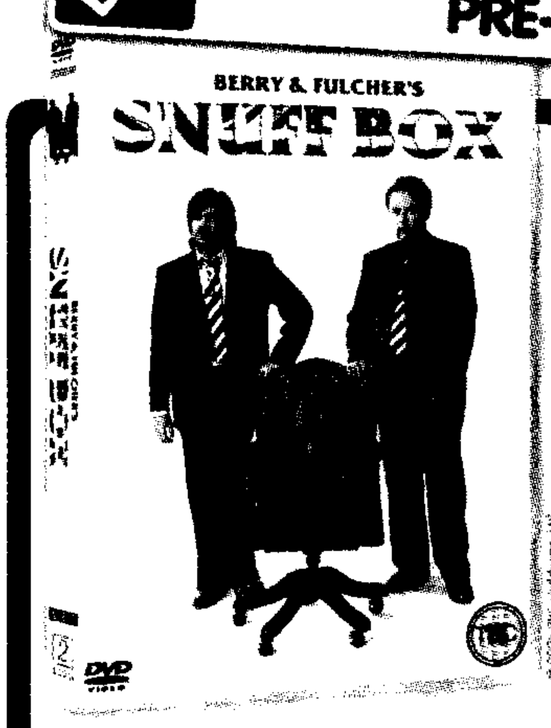

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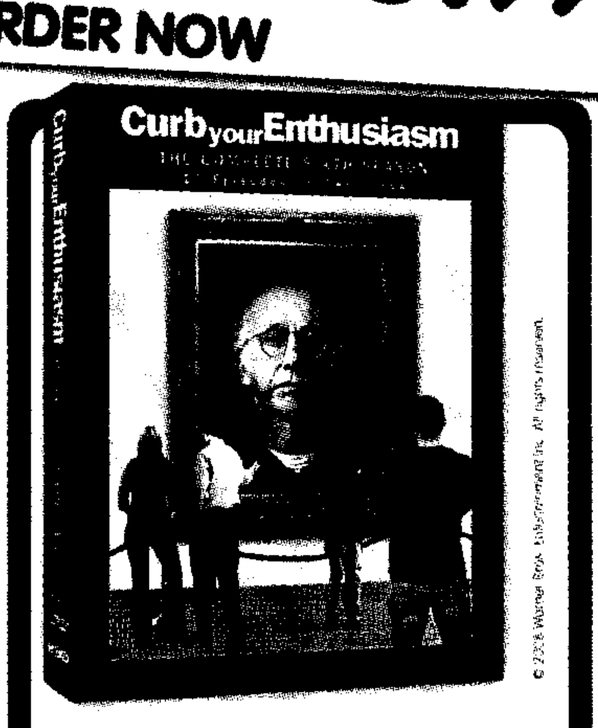

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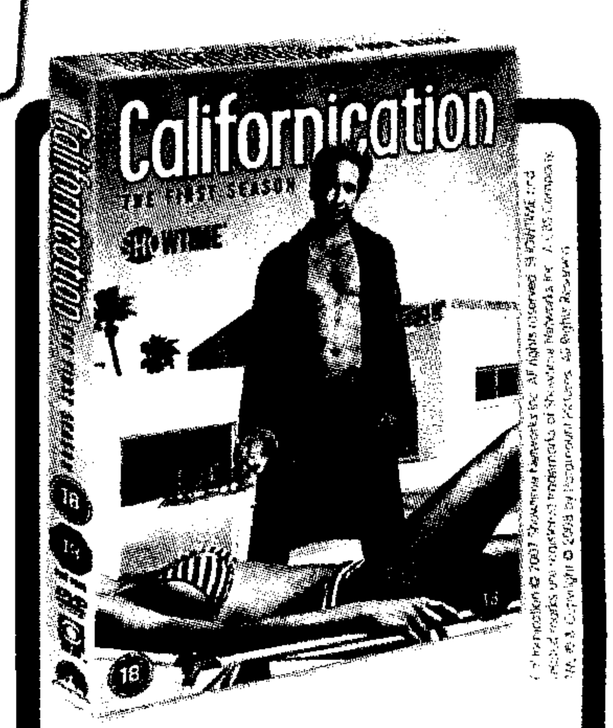

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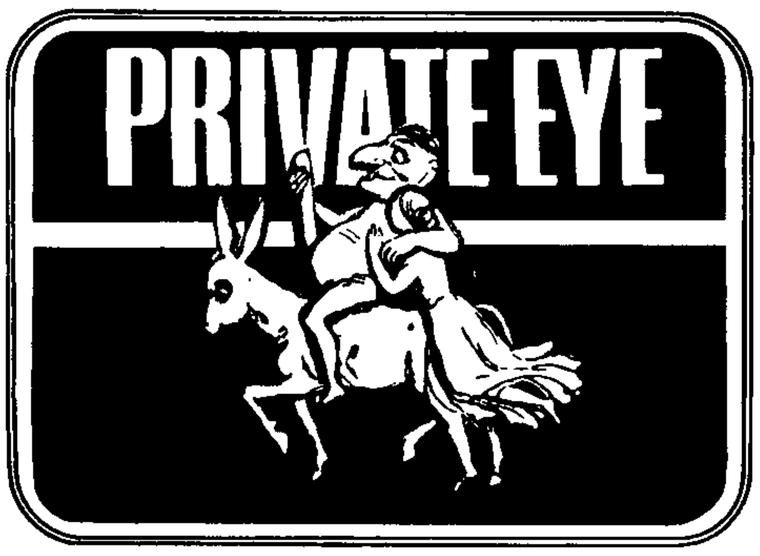

Gordon's Crewed!

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TESCO AVOIDS THE ISSUE

DAYS after the *Guardian* admitted libelling Tesco by falsely claiming that it had avoided corporation tax through a complex web of offshore operations, and agreed to pay compensation, *Private Eye* has discovered that Tesco has indeed been avoiding corporation tax through, er, another complex web of offshore operations.

The scheme unearthed by the *Eye* centres on an outfit called Cheshunt Overseas Limited Liability Partnership (accounts available online from Companies House), whose partners are a Hungarian company called Tesco Global Stores Ltd, Irish firm Tesco Ireland Ltd and another outfit called Cheshunt Hungary Servicing LLC. The set-up is completed by a branch of Cheshunt Overseas LLP (named after the location of Tesco's HQ) in the Swiss alpine tax haven of Zug, through which the firm lends money to other companies in the Tesco group.

Tesco denies that this is tax avoidance. Rather, it is "financial planning" to fulfil its duties to shareholders and to run its business "as efficiently as possible". But the interest on these loans racks up very nicely in Zug, where it is taxed at just 6 percent, as against the standard UK rate of 30 percent. Since being established in 2005, up to February 2007 a total of £66.7m had accumulated, on which just £4m tax was paid. Tax avoided up to then was therefore £16m, though this is likely to be just the start. Tesco refused to say how much more was salted away in the last year.

So why the need for the unusual "limited liability partnership" with a Swiss branch? The reason is that dumping millions in tax haven companies is a widespread old trick that the Revenue has been on to for 25 years since chancellor Nigel Lawson first introduced "controlled foreign companies" legislation to claw back the lost tax. As loopholes in these rules have been exploited then blocked, the determined tax avoider has needed ever more convoluted set-ups. Hence the Dublin-Budapest-Zug-Cheshunt arrangement. The Hungarian partner also has its own branch in Zug, which may be up to the same tricks but whose accounts are secret. Tesco refused to comment.

Sent a list of questions on the implications and extent of the scheme and the reaction of tax officials, Tesco replied: "This partnership is used to fund our overseas businesses. It is common practice for global businesses operating in other markets to fund development in similar ways. We have an open relationship with HMRC and discuss our tax arrangements and planning with them on an ongoing basis. We believe this structure is compliant with the government's controlled foreign companies legislation."

HMRC is on record as taking a very dim view of such arrangements, however.

And what does exposure of this scheme now mean for the *Guardian* action? Tesco even alleged "malicious falsehood" against the paper and its editor Alan Rusbridger, while all along it knew it was knee-deep in… avoiding corporation tax! The grocer justified the ferocity of its response as a defence against a "devastating attack on its integrity and ethics".

As the Tesco spokesman told the *Eye,* the company already pays more than £1bn a year in tax. When it comes to saving on the tax bill, every little helps, it seems.

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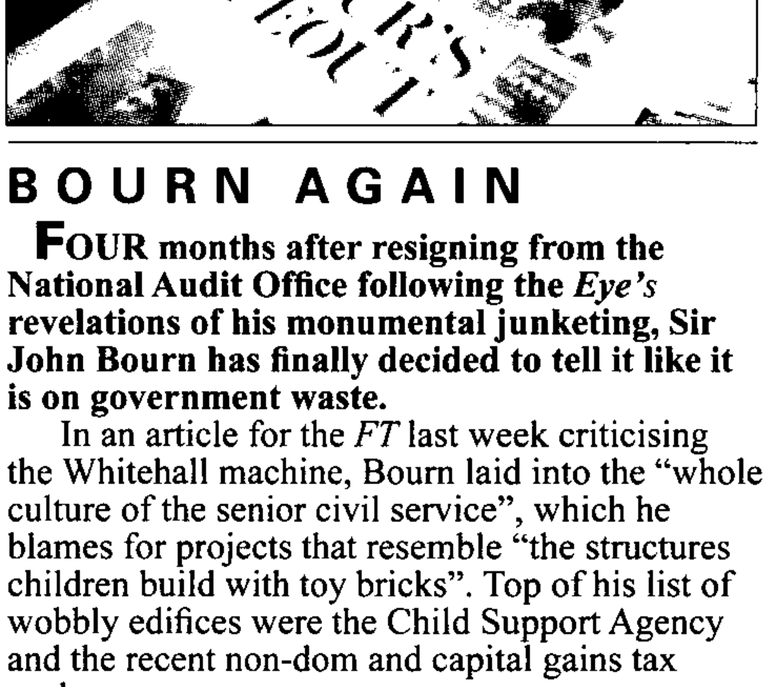


BOURN AGAIN

FOUR months after resigning from the National Audit Office following the *Eye's* revelations of his monumental junketing, Sir John Bourn has finally decided to tell it like it is on government waste.

In an article for the *FT* last week criticising the Whitehall machine, Bourn laid into the "whole culture of the senior civil service", which he blames for projects that resemble "the structures children build with toy bricks". Top of his list of wobbly edifices were the Child Support Agency and the recent non-dom and capital gains tax cock-ups.

Civil servants' unions were quick to point out that these failures were in fact political; they were too polite to mention that the CSA disaster was also in large part down to IT supplier EDS, who just happened to have entertained Sir John and Lady Bourn at polo matches and – most crucial of all to the business of auditing – even flew the NAO boss out to watch the 2006 football World Cup final in Berlin (not to mention all the dinners) while escaping criticism from him.

Bourn reserved his sternest condemnation for the Ministry of Defence's equipment programme. "There are more projects in it than there will ever be the money to buy. Delays, reduced specifications, rising unit costs and cuts in numbers of items purchased are the likely result. The range of projects should be more strictly controlled at the outset."

Which of course is exactly the message Bourn should have delivered in the years before he resigned, when his words mattered and the current crisis in defence budgets might have been averted. Instead his annual major projects reports kept any criticism lukewarm at worst. In 2006 Bourn even introduced his report by claiming it "shows the Ministry of Defence has responded to recommendations made by the National Audit Office and the Committee of Public Accounts, on controlling increases in forecast expenditure and living within its means". Exactly the opposite, in other words, of what he really thought.

Surely it can only be a coincidence that his annual failure to nail the wasted billions enabled more billions to be poured into the coffers of defence firms like BAE, Lockheed Martin, Finmeccanica and others, who just happened to enjoy taking Sir John and his wife to air shows, rugby internationals and expensive restaurants.

PS: Bourn's words were appreciated by at least one politician. The following day's *FT* ran a letter from John Spellar, MP: "John Bourn's article shows what a great loss he has been to the public service. It also demonstrates the stupidity of the campaign against him by the media and some politicians". Spellar was a little-remembered defence minister from 1999 to 2001.

SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE

"Avram Grant, the Chelsea first-team coach, has a perspective on life because of the traumas his family suffered in the Holocaust, but even he was struggling to find the words to ease the pain of Terry, who was white with shock."

– Matt Dickinson, the Times*, on Chelsea's Champions League defeat*

"I think I preferred it when the Labour party put leaflets through our door"

Street of Shame

Mirror **columnist Tony Parsons wasn't the only one to slam Labour's crude by-election campaign in Crewe, in particular claims that the Tories' use of a Bentley was "proof that Tory candidate Edward Timpson was just a posh toff with no connection to the ordinary folk of Crewe".**

"Bentley may be a symbol of luxury worldwide, but not in Crewe," Parsons pointed out, reminding readers that Bentleys have been made in the town since 1946, providing generations of families with work. "Pointing self-righteous fingers might have worked elsewhere, but using a Bentley as an example of privilege in Crewe is thick."

And where did this "thick" notion first gain currency? Er, in the *Daily Mirror*, which on 15 May printed a large "exclusive" picture of Timpson campaigners climbing out of the luxury motor beneath the headline "HOORAY BENTLEY".

HOW keen was *Daily Telegraph* editor Will Lewis on the idea of giving a £250,000-a-year column to London's new mayor, Boris Johnson?

Lewis was far from enthusiastic about Boris's campaign, letting colleagues know he considered the blond bombshell to be a useless "toff" (the thirsty Lewis prefers to consider himself an Essex barrow boy), and happily running Simon Heffer's vitriolic attack on Boris in the week of the mayoral election.

Credit for re-hiring Boris as a *Torygraph* columnist (*Tory propagandist, surely? Ed*) is being given to *Telegraph* management supremo "Sir" Murdoch MacLennan. So is he now editing the paper as well as selling the squares on its classified advertising pages?

MORE on Jasper "Our Sally" Gerard, the *Telegraph*'s brilliant new columnar signing.

When he began his Jockstrap-style sports column last month, other section editors were urged to use this "big name" (*sic*) too. Thus after penning a distinctive Notebook for the op-ed page on 2 May ("Who gave Jasper a job on the *Telegraph*?" one enraged reader wrote to inquire), the columnist took his special brand of magic to the travel section.

In a fit of inspiration he decided to mark the first anniversary of Madeleine McCann's disappearance by re-enacting her family's fateful holiday, engineering a freebie to Portugal with his wife and two children, plus a security guard (for baby-minding duties while the Gerards were in the *tapas* bar), plus *his* wife and three children.

The travel editor was so appalled by Gerard's tasteless account of travelling in the McCanns' footsteps he has flatly refused to print it.

AUGUST 2007, and inaptly-named *Sun* showbiz columnist Gordon "Smart" has a hot exclusive.

"Rock legend David Bowie is set to star in *Dr Who* – as an evil alien abductor. Producers reckon the Ziggy Stardust singer, now 60, makes a perfect villain because of his 'great other-worldly look'."

In something of a first, Bowie manages to shoot this tale down in flames before it even appears: "Tomorrow's *Sun* newspaper has a half page exclusive," his official website announces. "The whole story is news to him. David Bowie is not planning to star in *Dr Who* and the whole story is 'absolute tish and tosh'."

Undeterred, Smart resumed his role as Bowie's careers adviser on 17 May, as "great news reaches me from luvvie land. Glam rock legend David Bowie has finally given permission for a stage show based round his mighty catalogue of classics. The Thin White Duke is teaming up with top director Peter Shaufuss to bring his bonkers sci-fi film *The Man Who Fell To Earth* to the boards."

Bowie's almost immediate response, via davidbowie.com? "Absolute toss. I have no idea who Peter Shaufuss is either."

WHEN Carla Bruni's nipples graced the front page in March, many thought all inhibitions had been thrown to the wind at the *Daily Mail*. But some things remain unacceptable in Paul Dacre's thrillsheet – and elephantine penises are one of them.

Page 3 of the paper on 14 May was filled by the image of a "curious" six-ton elephant getting up close and personal with a Volkswagen Golf in the Hluhluwe game park in South Africa; but curiously, the reason for the animal's interest – a large erection which it presumably hoped to insert somewhere in the vehicle – was airbrushed out, rendering the paper's headline "I've got a crush on you!" somewhat confusing.

Mail readers who want to see an elephant's penis are advised to head to that one-stop-shop for online filth, dailymail.com, where the beast remains intact.

DACRE AGONISTES

IN THE last *Eye* we noted that the *Daily Mail*'s plan to serialise Andrew Hosken's biography of Ken Livingstone fell apart after the BBC pre-empted Hosken's revelation that the libidinous newt-fancier has three "secret" children. But we now learn editor Paul Dacre was already having second thoughts about the serialisation.

With the *Evening Standard* nailing its colours firmly to the mast, Dacre didn't want his paper to appear anti-Ken as well. On the Friday evening before polling day, for instance, the *Mail* was about to publish an enthusiastic full-page editorial backing Boris Johnson – but Dacre, who was heading off on holiday, rang from the airport at 6pm and ordered it to be completely rewritten. The new and shorter version paid handsome tribute to Ken Livingstone ("a rather more substantial figure than his critics predicted… more friendly to business than you might expect") before offering Boris a fairly tepid endorsement almost as an afterthought.

By the time the page had been remade the first edition was two hours late, losing the *Mail* many thousands of copies. Why waste so much money agonising over whether a Tory paper should oppose a Labour candidate? The answer was in the printed version of the editorial: "This election has considerable political significance. A triumph for Boris would be a heavy blow to Labour. But if Ken manages to cling on, Labour backbenchers will begin to believe they have put the worst behind them. David Cameron could lose significant momentum."

A blow to Labour is also a blow to Paul Dacre's dear friend Gordon Brown. Dacre and Brown are not only friends but kindred spirits – unclubbable, Blair-hating, depressive, prone to volcanic rages. Dacre also shares Brown's contempt for David Cameron and George Osborne, regarding them as bumptious lightweights. Some colleagues suspect he actually wanted Livingstone to scrape back in, though he realised the *Mail* would look ridiculous if it went that far.

But then the paper looks ridiculous anyway, given its political traditions. Even when Cameron spoke up for Thatcherite good-housekeeping last week, the *Mail*'s praise could hardly have been more muted: "*Step by tiny step*, David Cameron is *inching* towards an economic policy that is *almost* recognisable as Conservative." (Emphasis added.) Contrast that with the *Mail* editorial on Labour's emergency mini-budget a week earlier: "It is nonsense to argue, like some in the increasing febrile Westminster village, that the 10p debacle is a fatal wound. For a start, the prime minister has listened to the public and acted to rectify his error. Some four million of the low-paid workers and pensioners who lost out will have full and immediate compensation… Mr Brown and Chancellor Alistair Darling deserve credit, too, for choosing the right means to help those who suffered."

Can this really be the *Daily Mail*? Under any other Labour PM it would be yelling out denunciations *fortissimo*. Dacre's despairing colleagues now suspect he may postpone his retirement as editor until after the general election purely to stop the paper monstering his beloved Gordon. Not that he'll actually advocate a Labour vote, of course; but there will be sympathetic coverage of Brown throughout the campaign, followed by a half-hearted last-minute endorsement of the Tories – followed, of course, by a well-earned peerage in Gordon's farewell honours list.

PLUNGING morale at the *Financial Times*, where hacks have been in dispute over pay and conditions for the past six months and are girding their loins for industrial action, as managers insist that bad times are ahead and now is not the time to make up for years of below-inflation settlements.

With brilliant timing, *FT* chief executive John Ridding and *FT Weekend* editor Andrew Davis chose this moment to invite *FT Weekend* contributors to a lavish "cocktail party" on 2 July at Le Mas Candille, a five-star, Michelin-starred hotel on the Côte d'Azur.

For some reason this didn't go down too well with the paper's NUJ officials, who stuck up posters modelled on the invitation, summoning hacks to a meeting in the sixth-floor canteen ("er, sorry, no cocktails or canapés") last week. Despite the posters being torn down by Davis and his minions, it was the biggest such meeting in living memory. After passing a unanimous vote of no-confidence in senior management, the hacks decided to refer the pay dispute to ACAS as a prelude to holding a secret ballot for industrial action.

AD NAUSEAM

CONFIDENT of a Chelsea victory in last Wednesday's Euro-footie game, club sponsors Samsung booked full-page ads in the next day's papers, with a photo of John Terry, Nicolas Anelka and two other players. The slogan? "Imagine, Design that performs."

By the time it appeared, Chelsea fans couldn't imagine anything of the sort: Terry and Anelka were the two men whose missed penalties had delivered victory to Manchester United!

PORKIES AND YORKIES

SECONDS out, round three in the battle of the heavyweights: the Duchess of York (née Sarah Ferguson) versus the *Daily Mail*'s Allison Pearson (née Allison Lobbett). Following Fergie's demand that we "focus on Pearson's derrière" after her unkind comments about her 19-year-old daughter's figure, the columnist swung back into action.

"She claims that I, and other journalists, called her daughter fat, which I didn't, though I did express a less-than-flattering, if widespread, thought about an unfortunate bikini her daughter wore on holiday (a garment, incidentally, which Beatrice herself admitted had been a fashion error)," Pearson squawked. "By pushing her two girls into the limelight, she makes them vulnerable to negative comment…

"Conveniently, the Duchess forgot to mention that the main thrust of my remarks arose from complaints by Princess Beatrice's detectives about the level of protection the 19-year-old needed as she gadded from nightclub to nightclub, from foreign jaunt to foreign jaunt. The public pays for that vast security bill, and we are entitled to express an opinion about whether such ostentatious behaviour is a proper use of taxpayers' money."

Some facts to bear in mind:

1) Pearson certainly did not call Beatrice "fat" in her column of 30 April. She merely demanded that "someone buy the poor girl a sarong, for her sake, as well as ours," pointed out she was "pear-shaped" and accused her of inheriting her father's physique. It was in an entirely different column in January that she called the teenager "Miss Piggy" and claimed she gorged on Krispy Kreme doughnuts, but that is surely long forgotten.

2) Oh, hang on... It was in that same piece four months ago that Pearson actually made her point about Beatrice's detectives, which is apparently "the main thrust of her remarks", so perhaps we'd better remember it after all.

3) Beatrice did indeed admit she regretted wearing the bikini – specifically, to *Mail* journalist Richard Kay, to whom when cornered at a charity event the following week she said: "Why oh why did I wear that one?… I thought people were a bit mean, but I'm learning it comes with the territory. The trouble is I don't have much confidence, so it can be quite upsetting."

4) Far from pushing Beatrice into the limelight, her mother wasn't even present when the photograph in question was taken, but…

5) …fortunately, photographers from both Barcroft Media and Matrix, two of the hated paparazzi agencies whom the *Mail* solemnly swore never to use again after the death of Beatrice's aunt Diana, were!

PS: The *Mail* has not always disapproved of Princess Beatrice's figure. When she swam with her sister in the Mediterranean back in July 2001, the paper noted the event approvingly beneath the headline "THE SUNSHINE GIRLS: How the bikini princesses made a splash in the Med." Beatrice and Eugenie were respectively 12 and 11 at the time.

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

SO MUCH for the special committee set up by Rupert Murdoch to safeguard the "editorial independence" of the *Wall Street Journal*.

Having got rid of the old editor, Marcus Brauchli, the Digger has now replaced him with loyal stooge Robert Thomson, former editor of the *Times*, who was initially brought to New York as "publisher" of the *Journal*.

Some Americans actually seemed to believe Murdoch's promise to maintain the independence of the *Journal* when he bought it – despite the fact he barely pays lip service to a similar committee that oversees the *Times*. Hilariously, the *WSJ* committee has welcomed Thomson's appointment as editor, describing his "history of independence in editorial decision-making at the *Times* of London". Can this be the same Robert Thomson who slavishly toed the Murdoch line on New Labour, Iraq, China, etc? throughout his five-year editorship?

Thomson was first tipped to become editor of the *Journal* last summer but insisted he was not interested. When the *Observer* ignored his protestations and ran a story in June 2007 that Murdoch was lining him up for the job, Thomson wrote a furious letter to the *Observer*'s then editor, Roger Alton, saying the story was complete rubbish – not least, said Thomson, because he was great friends with *WSJ* editor Brauchli and the *Observer*'s story was jeopardising that relationship.

Once Murdoch succeeded in buying the *Journal*, it became clear just how special that friendship was. After Thomson's arrival as publisher, Brauchli kept his job for just four months before being paid off, so creating the vacancy Thomson has now filled.

"Dave has kindly come in to warn you about the dangers of tombstoning"

HACKWATCH

Polly Toynbee

BLISS was it in that dawn to be alive. "There is a new light-headedness in the Labour party," Polly Toynbee exulted in a *Guardian* column last May, as Tony Blair started packing his bags. "With the coming of Gordon Brown there is scope for hope."

But would the light-headedness be the prelude to a humdinging hangover? Surely not…

29 June 2007: The day after Brown takes over at No 10, Polly is still delirious. "David Cameron's discomfort will deepen amid a flurry of popular announcements," she predicts. "Brown will chart a new course and present a government speaking in a less strident voice. Today promises refreshing new faces in junior ranks. All this should summon back angry defectors fled to Lib Dems or limbo."

25 September: Off to the Labour conference, festooned with banners proclaiming "Strength to Change Britain". Change it how? "The man himself is that change," Polly explains. "For a man they said could never do modern, touchy-feely politics, he does it well and the story does indeed resonate with his policies. So now his story is the nation's own narrative too."

9 October: Brown has to explain why he's chickened out of a general election. Or, as Polly prefers to put it: "The bear was baited and the bear survived, keeping both his dignity and his temper… All in all, he faced down the baying press for an hour without flinching and with good humour."

12 October: Whoops! "This was more than a horrible humiliation for the prime minister," Polly wails, after Gordon adopts Tory policies. "This was the week that social democracy ebbed away in England… How has Gordon Brown managed in such a short time to shipwreck himself and his party?" She supplies the answer: her former hero has a "vision void", and an approach "as shameless as it is dysfunctional". So it's all over? Not so fast. "Time is on Labour's side," she reassures us. "Soon Brown could start to spell out a vision."

9 November: And he does, in a Queen's Speech that makes Polly fall in love with him all over again. A climate change bill! More houses! A higher school leaving age! "This is a good package… a leap forward on many fronts." Only one thing puzzles her: "Why the glum Labour faces?"

1 January 2008: Everyone else is issuing gloomy new year messages, but our Pollyanna remains as defiantly chirpy as Hazel Blears on laughing gas. The Great Helmsman is steering us expertly through the economic rapids, house prices "can't fall far" and predictions of a shopping slump have been "trounced yet again". "A minor slowdown with neither inflation nor unemployment rising will see Brown's old 'no boom or bust' boasts triumph this time next year," she reckons. "I hazard the guess this may be another year when hyperventilating gloomsters have exaggerated."

19 February: How does the government look after the nationalisation of Northern Rock? "A dent or two, but no holes below the water line… The economy remains sound… So far so good."

14 March: Most commentators thought Alistair Darling's budget rather dull. "Dull?" Polly shrieks. "Hardly… All those who have despaired of Labour should pause here to give them credit." The policy of Darling and Brown can be summarised in one word – "fairness".

11 April: "Why is Brown on the slide?" Polly finds it baffling. Gordon Brown is "a man of sincere beliefs… certainly the cleverest prime minister in living memory", and for 10 years she happily believed that "when the bonnie prince sails home, the egregious sins of opportunistic unprincipled Blairism would be expunged". Now, alas, "the Wizard of Oz stands exposed, the emperor has no clothes, the box of secrets is empty." Time to abandon hope? Of course not. "Labour deserves another term," she insists. "The time is short – but it's never over until the fat returning officer sings."

2 May: The day after the local elections, and the fat returning officer has sung all night. "Of course it's not all over for Labour," Polly writes on the *Guardian* website, forgetting what she said a few weeks earlier. "Labour has rarely been so united in all its history." If Gordon Brown "makes up his mind and offers a clear direction, everyone will follow".

6 May: Or perhaps not. Polly suddenly realises that Labour "has become the stupid party – dumb, directionless, depressing…[it] has nothing to say and no territory to call its own."

20 May: Polly chides Labour for running "a witlessly patronising anti-toff campaign" in the Crewe by-election. She should know: if she consults her cuttings she may recall which *Grauniad* columnist urged London voters to reject Boris Johnson because he was "effete", "foppish" and, er, a "toff". On the doorsteps of Crewe she finds that voters "just want to wallop Labour, whatever the consequences", and once again she's baffled. It is, she complains, "an irrational political stampede. After all, nothing dreadful has happened in the last six months apart from a bit of political bungling". Irrational indeed: Brown may have shipwrecked himself and his party, revealed himself as a Wizard of Oz or a naked emperor with an empty box of secrets and nothing to say – but, according to the eternal Pollyanna, it's no big deal. Full speed ahead, bonnie prince!

THE ZZZ-LIST *Truly pathetic non-stories about celebrities from the national press...*

"Kim Cattrall kicked up her heels at the *Sex and the City* film premiere in London this week – before kicking her heels entirely off. The style icon was clearly not prepared to suffer for fashion, dumping her designer shoes in favour of bare feet on Monday night… The 51-year-old was later pictured arriving at the film's after-party wearing a different pair of heels." – *Megan Levy, Daily Telegraph, 14 May*

LATEST APPOINTMENTS

WHEN Gordon Brown appointed his favourite banker (and leadership campaign donor) Paul Myners to manage the "Personal Accounts Delivery Authority", the challenge was to launch a new state-backed pension savings scheme in Britain.

Important stuff. So who is Myners's first choice to sit on the PADA board? Step forward Alison Wright, formerly marketing chief of the Egg credit card.

Wright has been unemployed since Egg was caught summarily cancelling 160,000 of its customers' credit card accounts earlier this year. Egg claimed the cardholders posed a risk in these straitened times, but it turned out they were actually sensible people who paid off their statements every month, denying Egg lots of lovely interest.

Wright left Egg shortly after the firm failed to deal with the ensuing PR disaster. During her tenure, Egg was also heavily criticised for its hard sell of payment protection insurance.

Wright will be joined on the PADA board by Bradford & Bingley group financial director Chris Willford. In 2006 Bradford & Bingley put aside £89.4m to cover the mis-selling of endowment mortgages. And this February Willford had to announce that it had lost around £94m on "financial instruments" related to the sub-prime crisis. The news wiped almost a quarter off the company's share value.

ANOTHER day, another dollar for the frisky "atomic kitten" Barbara Thomas Judge, chairman of the UK Atomic Energy Authority, who somehow finds the time to sit on the board of at least 40 other companies and institutions.

Unabashed by criticism from MPs who wonder how she can do justice to UKAEA while holding down so many other jobs, Lady Judge has taken on yet another directorship – at Massey Energy, an American corporation based in Richmond, Virginia.

Massey is a coal producer that competes directly with the nuclear industry and uses destructive surface-mining practices, including "mountaintop removal". It has a terrible record for safety violations and environmental pollution: two months ago the company had to pay a $20m fine for more than 4,500 breaches of the Clean Water Act at its coal-mines in West Virginia and Kentucky. Every year, the government estimated, Massey had been discharging 380 million pounds of slurry, acid and other pollutants into hundreds of rivers in the two states.

PR WEAK

MORE on the exciting team being assembled at the Ledbury Group, the lobbying outfit formed last autumn by Nick Bent, former adviser to Tessa Jowell, and Malcolm Gooderham, former press officer for Michael Portillo (see *Eye* 1207). Former *Mail on Sunday* editor Jonathan Holborow has been recruited to their "Leadership Panel".

In a recent piece for *PR Week*, Nick Bent complained that too many people go into the business because they "simply ran out of road in their chosen careers". This sounds eerily like a pen-portrait of his new colleague Holborow, who was ousted from the *MoS* a decade ago after the death of his protector Sir David English. The next editor, Peter Wright, discovered on arrival that Holborow had "made some very extravagant and disadvantageous commitments" to pay enormous retainers to freelance chums who scarcely wrote a word. But by then Holborow had banked his £750,000 pay-off and retired to Kent to run a shop, returning to London occasionally to advise porn baron Richard Desmond on "editorial integrity" (*sic*) and tell William Hague how to win general elections (*sic* again).

He also became chairman of the Conservative Association in Michael Howard's seat of Folkestone and Hythe. Last year he was fined £1,700 and banned from driving for 16 months for being way over the alcohol limit when he crashed into another car after leaving the Folkestone Tories' annual dinner. Since the ban is still in force, he has indeed "run out of road".

CALLED TO ORDURE

Revolving doors

FORMER trade and sports minister Richard Caborn (Lab, Sheffield Central) wasn't happy standing in for another ex-trade minister, Ian McCartney, to answer questions from the public administration committee on the "revolving door" that propels departing members of government into lucrative private sector jobs.

Anxious to dispel suspicion that his own new employer – nuclear and civil engineering firm Amec – simply wanted access to his contacts book, Caborn went into grumpy self-justification mode. He was sitting alongside Lord (Norman) Warner, who has bagged five separate jobs since stepping down as a "modernising" health minister.

Both agreed lobbying government was important, as is the credibility of the lobbyist. But they seemed oblivious to the lack of balance in, say, the nuclear debate when ex-ministers only work for those who can afford to pay them. Caborn earns £75,000 a year from Amec, and McCartney £115,000 a year from the nuclear firm Fluor. The point was highlighted a few days later when less wealthy Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and Amnesty International were questioned.

Caborn tried to maintain a principled stance, claiming he took his job with Amec "based more on my constituency and something in which I deeply believed". This prompted Paul Flynn (Lab, Newport W) to point out that he, too, represented the interests of companies in his constituency, but "if they came to me and said they were going to give me £70,000 for the work I was doing, that would rightly be regarded as corruption. Explain the difference."

Flynn then asked what his constituents would think of Amec doubling his parliamentary salary when he was already supposed to be a full-time MP. Caborn insisted the job "will massively enhance the wealth-creating base of Sheffield and my constituents". In which case, Flynn wanted to know: "Why do you take a salary for it?"

"Because they want to pay me. What is wrong with that?" snapped Caborn. "I do not believe I am prostituting myself." It was an interesting choice of word.

The select committee also questioned various schmoozers and grease monkeys from the corporate relations world, including Tesco's legal affairs director Lucy Neville-Rolfe and Tom Kelly, former spokesman for Tony Blair and now the public face of airports operator BAA.

"Our approach is to try to work with government to explain what is good and how you can do things that will help society," gushed Neville-Rolfe. "We engage with government." So no browbeating of the planning process to get permission to build hideous superstores across the land. That's all right, then.

Tesco has a team of political operators who spend their time "talking" to MPs in Whitehall, she said. When it was put to her that she could easily get Cabinet ministers on the phone, she assented by casually nodding her head. Lib Dem Paul Rowen (Rochdale) noted that, by amazing coincidence, Tesco had hired a former private secretary to Blair, David North, as well as giving work to Blair's ex-pollster Lord (Philip) Gould. Neville-Rolfe insisted there was "nothing political" about this and that North was valued for his "knowledge of the environment and climate change which has helped us to do some very good things".

Kelly, meanwhile, was the model of superior calm. When it was suggested he had "quite a contacts book" of ministers and mandarins, he methodically replied: "Actually, no, because my main contacts were with other departments' press officers."

Kelvin Hopkins (Lab, Luton N) picked up on fears that Kelly could use his contacts to swing influence BAA's way. "You could literally walk into Downing Street, into the heart of power, and speak to the shakers and movers in the Prime Minister's entourage in a way that other people do not." Kelly was aghast. "You overstate my role," he protested. "I was a spokesman, not the policy maker." Did he make the same distinction when interviewed for the BAA job?

Fun though the inquiry has been, don't expect any tough new measures against lobbyists contacting civil servants and ministers, as the committee can't see how these could be policed. But members could perhaps still stick their foot in the revolving door to restrict the grubby practice of ministers and civil servants joining lobbying firms so soon after leaving government.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£4m Hole in Labour finances which leaves party facing bankruptcy by June

£4.6m Advance Tony Blair received for his memoirs

riverside homes (see In the Back, last *Eye*): webcams on weirs!

The EA's Thames waterways manager Eileen McKeever told concerned members of the Oxford Flood Alliance that to ensure riverside safety was not compromised by the sale of lock houses, EA staff were considering the use of web cameras at weirs. McKeever told the *Abingdon Herald* they were looking at "new technology, and ways it can increase information about the river".

If webcams really can spring into action to rescue boaters or operate old-fashioned manual river equipment in all weathers to prevent flooding, the new technology is impressive indeed. Back in the real world meanwhile campaign website www.saveourservice.org points out that residential lock keepers have hundreds of years of experience between them and knowledge of the river "cannot be replaced by a computer, web-cam positioned on a weir, centralised office or seasonally appointed staff".

More MAIN POLITICS

MPs lose fight for expenses to stay secret

Pressure on Michael Martin, the Commons Speaker, intensified last night after the House authorities lost their High Court battle to stop the disclosure of MPs' expenses.

MPs lose fight to keep expenses secret

The House of Commons has lost its High Court battle over an

Glasgow Herald website

CULT CORNER

AFTER City police failed in their attempt to prosecute a 15-year-old boy for holding up a sign reading "Scientology is not a religion, it is a dangerous cult", it's worth recalling the relationship between said cult and Inspector Knacker.

Although there have been similar protests in London, the Met Police have never summonsed sign-carriers under the public order act for using the word "cult". However, the protest on 10 May took place within the Square Mile and so came under the jurisdiction of City of London police who felt differently. In the event the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) declined to take the case to court and has issued new guidance on what is considered "threatening, abusive or insulting" on a demo.

In 2006 City of London police had to order an internal review of hospitality received, after it emerged that its officers had accepted thousands of pounds worth of dinners and freebies from the cult, sorry, the Church of Scientology (CoS), including an invitation to a celeb event attended by Tom Cruise. Chief Superintendent Kevin Hurley described the CoS as "a force for good" when opening its huge new City HQ.

However, the City cops aren't the only ones sucked in by Scientology. Earlier this year several forces were found dishing out anti-drugs leaflets produced by the CoS. As well as advising young people to stay off illegal drugs, the text praised founder L. Ron Hubbard and pushed the organisation's bizarre beliefs about prescription anti-depressants.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

METRIC martyrs looking for a new cause now the British pint is safe might want to turn their attention to Eurocrat meddling in nutrient recommendations.

Dealing with consumption of vitamins and minerals such as fluoride, magnesium and salt, they are set in the UK by the Food Standards Agency. But for how much longer?

A European Commission project, known as EURRECA and funded with £10.5m of taxpayers' cash, is pushing for standard EU-wide recommendations. The project will carry out research at a number of European universities but is coordinated by the European arm of the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), a US-headquartered organisation that is a front for the food and bioscience industry. Members include Bayer CropScience, Coca-Cola, McDonald's and Monsanto.

We'll bicker for months and end up paying French farmers even more

In fact many of these companies manage to participate twice in the project through another front organisation, the European Food Information Council, membership of which largely duplicates that of ILSI. Why deep-pocketed food multinationals should be paid from the public purse to develop nutrition recommendations is unclear, but one thing is for sure: ILSI has form. *Panorama* investigated it in 2004 for secretly funding a United Nations study on the role of sugar and carbohydrates in nutrition.

EURRECA's no doubt scientifically rigorous and entirely unbiased conclusions are eagerly awaited…

ETHICAL FOREIGN POLICY

HAVING kept the Dalai Lama out of Number 10, what are Gordon Brown and the government going to do next to kow-tow to China?

Answer: Send a cross-party delegation of 10 MPs to tour the People's Republic as part of a China Fellowship.

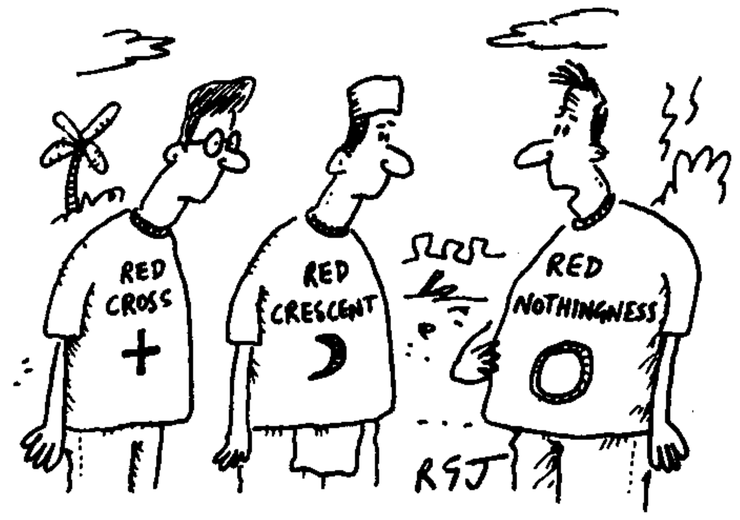
The MPs, sponsored by the Industry and Parliament Trust, are Labour's Graham Allen, Ben Chapman, Mark Hendrick, Bill Olner and Derek Wyatt; Tories David Amess, Adam Holloway, Peter Luff and Mark Prisk; and the Lib Dem Jeremy Browne. A clue to the motive for the trip is the identity of companies who are sponsoring it.

They include GKN (which is building car part factories in China); Arup (making millions from China's building boom); BP and Shell (supplying gas to fuel China's boom); PwC (bringing the delights of management consultancy to China); and Virgin (which is desperate to cash in on Chinese growth, although all of Richard Branson's schemes beyond flights to Shanghai, like Chinese mobile phones and radio stations, have so far gone wrong).

After the embarrassing spectacle of Gordon allowing Chinese "security officials" to fight with protesters on the streets of London during the Olympic torch relay, the China visit shows the prime minister isn't trying to please the Chinese by playing down human rights issues. Rather he is trying to please the British firms who want to make money from the less than spotless regime of president Hu Jintao.

WHILE aid agencies have to stay quiet about the Burmese junta in order to maintain their presence in the country during the relief effort, the Department for International Development (DfID) can't help but be political because it is a part of the government. But what has it actually achieved there?

In 2007 DfID moved its Burma relief programme from Bangkok to Rangoon. Ministers were delighted to get into the country, but the Commons international development committee warned of the dangers of going native. Human rights workers said DfID's civil servants would be monitored and isolated; they would not be able to help the refugees on the Thai border from Burma's wars against its ethnic minorities, and could not support pro-democracy groups for fear of offending their new hosts.



"We're an atheist humanitarian agency"

And so it has proved.

MPs visited the border and spoke to activists trying to defend women from the Shan minority who are the frequent victims of rape by the army. They said they "had tried in vain to meet and discuss funding opportunities with DfID".

At great personal risk, Burmese trade unionists smuggle themselves into the country and run clandestine workshops on democracy and human rights. They, too, wanted British support. They, too, couldn't get it.

DfID has lobbied hard in Whitehall to stop Britain backing the French proposal to airdrop emergency relief into Burma. Douglas Alexander, the International Development Secretary, showed far more passion in condemning air drops to its victims than he had ever shown in condemning the regime that was leaving them to die. Violating Burmese air space was an "incendiary" idea, he thundered.

This may have been a prudent rejection of a desperate plan – or it may just have been feebleness.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

18 days Time after Burma's cyclone that relief work was successfully concluded and reconstruction began, according to Burmese government

1.8m Number of Burmese people affected by cyclone who were yet to receive any aid, according to UN

EXAM NEWS LATEST

KATHLEEN Tattersall, head of new exam board regulator Ofqual, certainly set out to dampen expectations when she announced that students shouldn't expect exam marking to be "absolutely accurate". But inaccurate marking is just one of Ofqual's challenges.

At testing company ETS, for example, the pre-exam problems reported in the last *Eye* (such as a computer which rejected all would-be English exam markers on one day of testing) were merely a sign of things to come once the key stage tests got under way.

Many schools have complained about exam papers not being collected by ETS, while markers were left twiddling their thumbs as scripts weren't delivered to them. Schools were unable to log on to ETS's online registration system and panicked phone calls and emails to the company went unanswered. At education questions, MPs described the situation as "a shambles".

Still, it's hard to out-do EdExcel. The *Eye* has learned that last year it actually recruited a 16-year-old to mark GCSE maths exams!

Pip Moss had taken his GCSEs just a year earlier, but applied to mark GCSE "mathematics B" as a summer holiday job. Even though his application letter mentioned his recent GCSE successes, Edexhell snapped up the youngster, sending him a contract for specialist marking and even asking him to accept a larger allocation of test papers.

It was only after a second administrative cock-up, when Edexhell failed to send a password for its website, that the mistake was discovered. When Moss gave his date of birth via email to confirm his identity, the helpdesk staff noticed his age and pulled the plug on his job.

"Today we were tested on our revision for tomorrow's test on yesterday's post-mortem on Monday's test on Friday's revision..."

TV

The Duchess in Hull
The Duke
(both ITV1)

IT'S understandable that ITV1 must feel resentful about having no drama hits to match BBC1's *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes*. But the commercial network's response to the absence of the time-slip cop show from its schedules has been somewhat eccentric.

Rather than simply commissioning a rip-off drama of its own in which a character travels back to the 70s or 80s, the third channel has opted to commission the kind of programmes that might have been seen in about 1983.

So not only is Sir Trevor McDonald once again reading *News at Ten*, years after his retirement, but he is also to be found again fronting cringing monarchist documentaries of the kind he used to do when Princes William and Harry were little, which seemed antique and creepy even then.

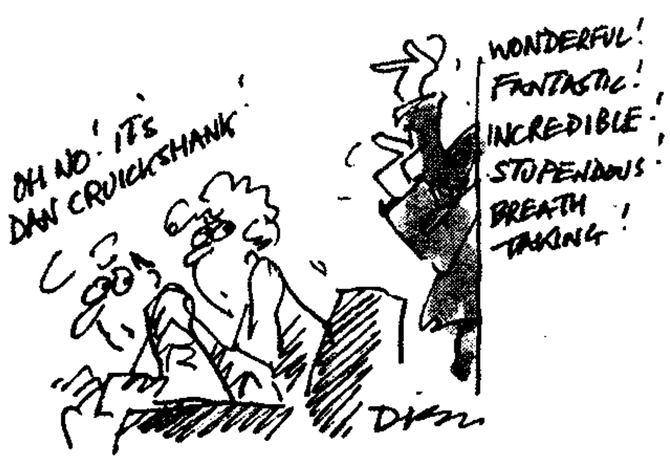
Large sections of **The Duke** consisted of Phil the Greek driving a Land Rover at frightening speeds across the Sandringham estate while Trev cowered in the passenger seat, looking terrified either that the vehicle would crash or that Phil's "plain speaking" (celebrated several times on the commentary) might be applied to him in ways leading to lengthy legal action.

Phil's voice was audibly ragged from his recent illness, but Trev wasn't allowed to mention that or, indeed, anything much at all. Having clearly been refused a formal interview, the presenter was reduced to throwing out faltering comments on some reactionary hot-button issues in the hope that the Duke would go off on one and get them some tabloid publicity.

"On a day like this, one could do with a bit of global warming, sir?" he whimpered as a violent storm engulfed the jeep. This was presumably supposed to invite a diatribe against David Cameron and Al Gore and other tree-hugging wusses, but even Phil isn't stupid enough to think that global warming means the sun coming out.

"One wonders, sir, if people haven't gone a little overboard about organic farming?" he floated at another point. But the interviewee managed to resist the desired rant about the nancy boy Prince of Wales and his marmalade made without causing harm to animals.

Managing the terrible combination of being ridiculously sycophantic (sometimes "sir" twice in a sentence) without winning the trust of its subject, *The Duke* would have been, in most months, the worst documentary around. But ITV1's *Ashes to Ashes* commissioning strategy led to an even worse mistake: a two-part documentary that could only have been inspired by the belief that it really was the early 80s and adoring crowds were desperate for a glimpse of the fun-loving Sarah, Duchess of York.



In **The Duchess in Hull**, Fergie flew back from her ten-year exile in New York to persuade a family of dole-claiming Yorkshire porkers – including a 13-year-old pizza-eating chain-smoker – to embrace the healthy living and eating that had allowed her to make millions as head of American WeightWatchers by convincing gullible Yanks that she was still royal.

A measure of the loss of judgement that still seems to engulf British documentary-makers working on films about the Windsors is that they actually left in a scene in which the lumbering locals failed to recognise their royal saviour. The implication was that the joke was on these witless proletarians, but the ones being silly were broadcasters who were making the programme 20 years too late.

Admittedly, aware that some viewers might be reluctant to commit two hours to watching a woman who was long ago married to the royal family's golf professional, the producers tried to manipulate sympathy with an early sequence in which Fergie coped with the "darkness" of her morning depressions by going to the gym and then plunging into an ice bath at her Manhattan apartment.

It was typical of the programme that it was happy to film Fergie as she shouted into the flat for the people inside to go and hide from the cameras. It would be tempting to call *The Duchess in Hull* tabloid television, but a self-respecting tabloid would have insisted on finding out if she had a man inside that flat and filming the contents of her fridge. Instead, the film could not have been more ludicrously reverential if Sir Trevor had been simpering in the jump seat of Fergie's limo.

Every sign of trash factual TV was here. There were two lingering shots of a British Airways 747 as Fergie left New York and landed in London, clunking product placement clearly given in return for being allowed to shoot a brief sequence in the cabin. There was also the obligatory moment in which the roly-poly proles broke down in tears – always the money shot on a project like this – and had to be consoled by the Duchess.

DCI Gene Hunt has become a folk hero but these shows usefully reminded viewers that there would be drawbacks to being transported to the 1980s: you'd have to watch a lot of forelock-tugging bollocks about the royals. Memo to ITV1: retro-chic, if it's going to work, needs to be ironic.

'Remote Controller'

MOSQUEBALLS

THE silliest of last summer's silly-season stories was finally laid to rest two weeks ago when West Midlands police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) admitted making false accusations against the producers of the Channel 4 *Dispatches* documentary *Undercover Mosque*.

Broadcast in January 2007, it showed preachers at various "moderate" British mosques – notably Green Lane in Birmingham – delivering hate-filled rants against *kuffaar*, ie non-Muslims. The local Knackers decided to investigate whether any offence had been committed. Seven months later they and the CPS issued a joint press release claiming that the real villains were not the preachers but the TV producers who exposed them. Bethan David, a CPS lawyer, said the film "completely distorted what the speakers were saying" by splicing together quotes out of context.

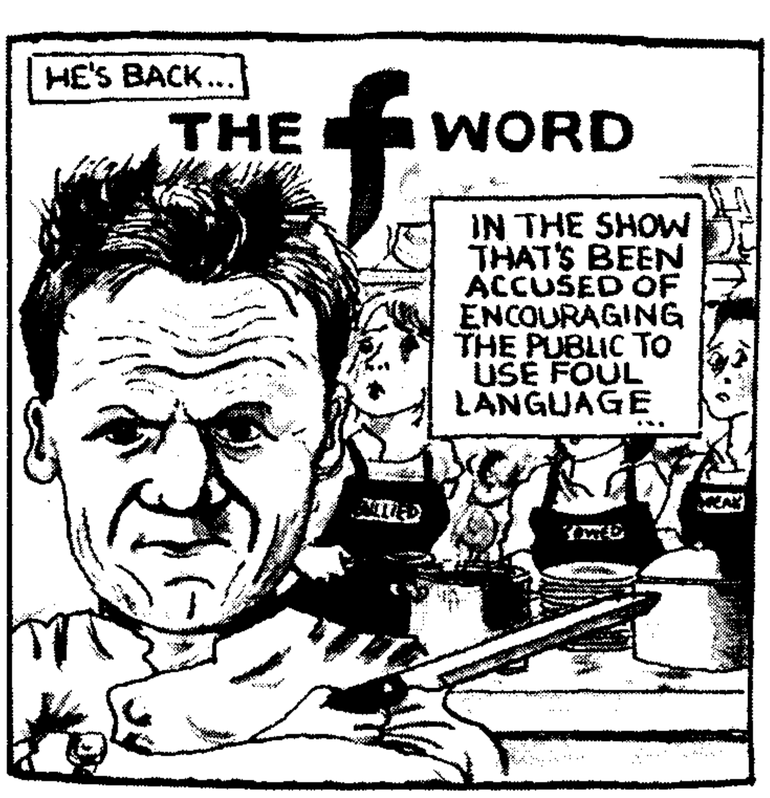
Anil Patani, who rejoices in the title "assistant chief constable (security and cohesion)", made a formal complaint to Ofcom. He said there had been "such an intensity of editing that those featured in the broadcast programme had been misrepresented", thus jeopardising "community cohesion" by creating an unfair perception of the hate-mongering preachers.

All this was seized on by newspapers and rival TV channels hungry for tales of TV fakery. But where was the evidence? Last August we asked the CPS and Knacker if they could give any examples to justify their phrase "complete distortion"; they couldn't.

And no wonder, since there weren't any. After exhaustive study of untransmitted footage, Ofcom announced in January this year that it found "no evidence" of misleading editing. Prominent speakers from certain mosques were shown denouncing *kuffaar* as "filthy", "accursed" and "criminals" because, er, this was what they said. In a public apology two weeks ago, forced out of them by the threat of libel action, West Midlands police and the CPS accepted as much: "We were wrong… there was no evidence that the broadcaster or programme makers had misled the audience… the programme accurately represented the material it had gathered." Damages of £100,000 will be paid to charity.

End of story? It shouldn't be. By their own admission, two leading figures in the criminal justice system made widely publicised accusations of serious dishonesty on the strength of *no evidence whatsoever*. Are they considering their position, or facing disciplinary action? Not at all.

Patani remains in charge of "security and cohesion" in Britain's second biggest police force, and David is now the CPS's "review lawyer" for terrorism prosecutions. Is someone who admits to making wholly false accusations really the best person to deal with such sensitive cases? The CPS assures us that David still has its "full confidence". But why?


HE'S BACK...
THE f WORD
IN THE SHOW THAT'S BEEN ACCUSED OF ENCOURAGING THE PUBLIC TO USE FOUL LANGUAGE...
"WHAT A F**KING WASTE OF PUBLIC MONEY!"
"F**KING HELL!"
"F**KING DISGUSTING!"
Gordon Ramsay's £8·5 million Channel 4 golden oven-gloves deal

DUMB BRITAIN

Quiz Call, five

Kait Borsay: Give me a famous name beginning with S.

Contestant: Sir Alex Ferguson.

KB: Give me two famous names beginning with S.

2nd contestant: Simon Cowell.

KB: And your second?

Contestant: Er, pass. I can't think of one.

KB: Just take a guess.

Contestant: Erm, no, I can't think of one.

The Weakest Link, BBC1

Anne Robinson: In the James Bond films, the character played by Honor Blackman in *Goldfinger* was called Pussy what?

Contestant: Finger.

MEDIA NEWS

IN 2003, when *Queer as Folk* writer Russell T. Davies went "poacher turned gamekeeper" and complained to the BBC about homophobia in, er, *Basil Brush* (a man got punched for making a pass at another man he thought was a woman, much to Basil's amusement), an approving *Guardian* cleared a page for him to vent his spleen.

"I ranted to myself and stomped round the kitchen, reduced to Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells," he wrote. "I complained to the BBC. They've promised to investigate, and might well decide I'm talking nonsense, though I look forward to arguing the point."

Five years on and Davies was last week moved to fire off another complaint – nay, a "stinging rebuke" which "contained a phrase you will never hear pre-watershed" – to a media organisation over its coverage of his pending departure as executive producer of *Doctor Who*. Its name? The *Guardian*, which kicked off a blog discussion on its website with hack Stephen Brook opining in the face of dozens of outraged *Guardianistas* that "I think he made the programme too childish, too camp and too gay".

I-SKY

"SKY ONE are cock-a-hoop after *Gladiators* kicked off with 1.8m viewers," reported the *Sun* on 13 May, in the 27th reference to the show the paper has managed to shoe-horn into its pages since its sister TV channel announced its resurrection in January.

"The return on Sunday of the cult classic proved a big draw despite having to compete with the sunshine… ITV must be kicking themselves for not picking up *Gladiators*."

Indeed ITV must. Why, only, er, 3.8m viewers had tuned in to watch ITV's own gameshow, *Beat The Star*, which went out at the same time.

A SUBSIDIARY of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, NDS, is to be hit with a legal bill of around $100m after a California jury found that it had illegally hacked a satellite TV decoder card made by rival company Echostar.

Reports of the case worldwide proclaimed NDS the victor, saying it was "substantially cleared" of the charges that it hired hackers to crack the smartcards then post instructions on how to avoid paying for TV on the internet. NDS said it had only cracked Echostar's cards to learn how to protect its own product rather than to undermine its competitor.

But while the court awarded damages of just $1,546 to Echostar over violations of US anti-piracy laws in a test case relating to a single hacked card, NDS is now liable for both sides' legal costs. Echostar says its legal costs from the six-year case and four-week trial total around $20m, while the *Australian Financial Review* estimates that NDS spent upwards of $80m fighting the allegations.

VISITORS to the Hay Festival who are looking forward to the world premiere of *For You*, the new opera from Ian McEwan and Michael Berkeley, may be in for a disappointment.

While their previous collaboration, *Or Shall We Die?* – a Thatcher-era plea for "womanly times" to replace phallocratic nuclear posturing – was ridiculed for its naivety, an interview by the pair suggests this latest offering will feel horribly familiar to the lovers of… bonkbusters.

For You is about an ageing, monstrous, egotistical, philandering conductor who claims *droit de seigneur* over the female members of his orchestra. "Sex is a big element", according to a *Times* interview, and there is a dark ending involving "a surprise comeuppance for the ghastly main character".

Can a Booker-winning novelist and a Radio 3 presenter really be recycling the plot of Jilly Cooper's 1999 orchestral sex romp, *Score!*? It seems so…

Curse of Gnome

SO. FAREWELL then Peter Hargitay, the Swiss-Hungarian con artist (*Eyes passim*) who had persuaded gullible blazers at the Football Association that he was the man to help England host the World Cup in 2018.

When new FA boss Lord David Triesman arrived at Soho Square, he took one look at Hargitay, held his nose and pointed to the door.

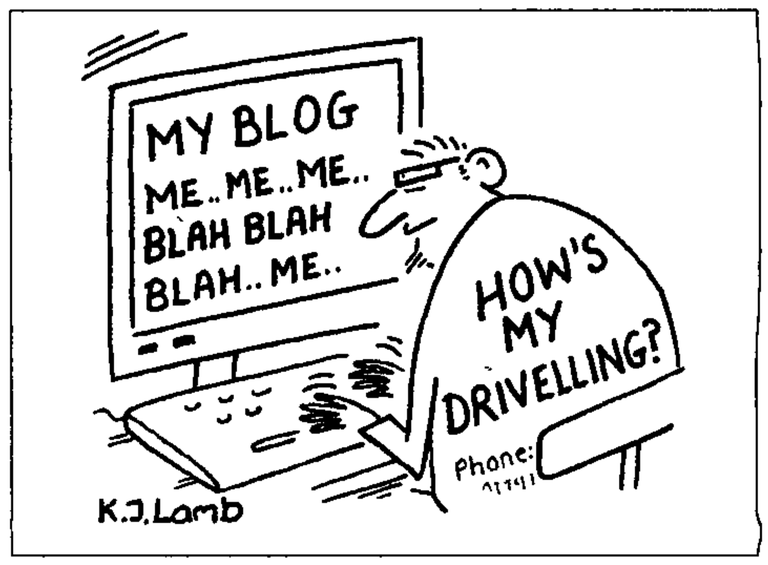
The over-paid blazers (last financial report had FA chief executive Brian Barwick trousering a 54 percent pay rise to £547,000) hadn't checked Hargitay out properly, trusting him to fill in their due diligence form. He seems not to have found space to mention the curious filings at the American Securities and Exchange Commission about his Caribbean shipping line a dozen years ago. Or a court judgement for more than £1m prompting the scamster to locate the company through which he offered his services to the FA, European Consultancy Network, in Cyprus.

● Lord Seb Coe, chair of FIFA president Sepp Blatter's invisible ethics committee, will not be reporting to FIFA's Congress in Sydney at the end of May, preferring to attend a Salvation Army dinner in Kingston, Jamaica, instead. Coe was appointed 20 months ago and has yet to pronounce on the scam artists, ticket touts and bribe takers in the FIFA leadership.

BRAND NEWS

INFONXX, the telecoms company that owns directory inquiries business 118 118, has decided to scrap its unpronounceable moniker and picked a new brand name "designed to be intriguing and challenging. It reflects our mission to exceed expectations".

And what is this brilliant new name? "The name kgb has tested very positively in research," enthused Infonxx founder Robert Pines in a memo to staff. It's certainly a bold choice of initials for a company currently expanding into Eastern Europe...



EDUCASHUN NEWZ

THE City Academy Bristol is seen by Labour as one of the academy scheme's greatest successes – even featuring in a flashy "behind the scenes" film on Downing Street's website. But the latest accounts reveal that the academy faces an unexpected £1.5m payout over the disputed cost of building work.

HBG Construction Western Ltd was awarded a £21,736,504 contract in July 2004 to construct new school buildings. The work has been finished, but the two sides' valuation of it is markedly different. The accounts show the discrepancy was originally £2.75m, though this has been negotiated down to £1.5m.

Even the lower sum would, of course, swallow three quarters of the £2m brought to the project by the much-vaunted private sponsors – Bristol City FC and the University of the West of England – whose expertise and efficiency are supposed to help schools avoid this kind of problem. Negotiations are continuing.

Meanwhile, in Barrow-in-Furness, plans for a new academy – sponsored by BAE, the arms dealers accused of corruption – moved a step further to reality.

The new academy, which plans to specialise in business, enterprise and technology, would replace all three non-religious secondary schools in the town, leaving none of Labour's much-vaunted parental choice. To understand how unpopular the plans are, at the recent council elections voters elected four members of the "Our Schools Are Not For Sale" (OSANFS) campaign group, unseated Barrow's Tory council leader Bill Joughin and came within a single vote of electing a fifth councillor.

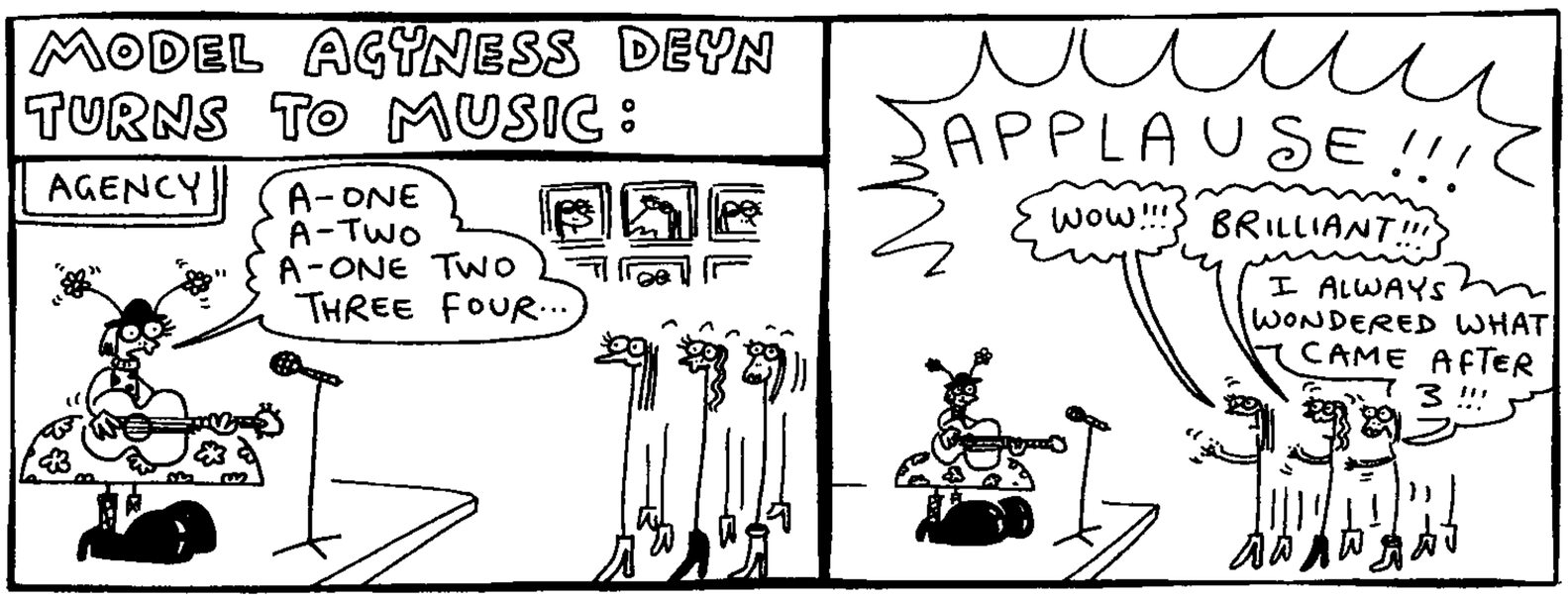
Despite this, just days after the election, Cumbria county council submitted its plans to the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the project was accepted into the "feasibility stage".

14 Lavatories are poorly maintained. Some cubicles had run out of toilet paper and the flushes, placed behind the loo seats, which appear to work on motion detectors, are haphazard, with some failing to activate.

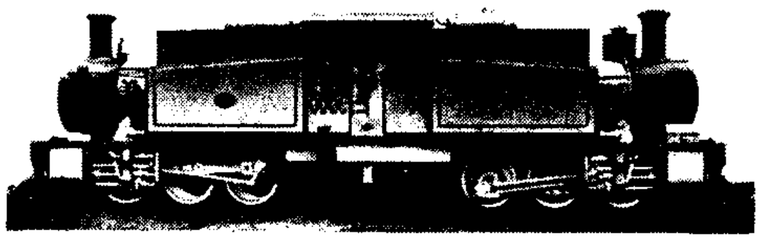
Evening Standard

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



SIGNAL FAILURES



Fares unfair

LABOUR clearly doesn't think passengers pay enough to private rail companies, so last week's introduction of so-called simpler fares (promised last summer by Transport Secretary Ruth Kelly) was a smokescreen for a second round of fare rises in less than six months.

Virgin raised some fares from Wales to London by more than 150 percent: clearly the £24m profit Richard Branson made last year from his 51 percent stake in Virgin trains (the rest belongs to Brian Souter's Stagecoach) was not enough.

National Express East Anglia slapped a 63 percent fare rise on many Colchester passengers, and watchdog Passenger Focus said the latest rise in unregulated tickets for travel to London before 10.15am means Norwich passengers now pay 18 percent more than they did in December.

Arriva CrossCountry used a statement about "cheaper advance fares and simpler tickets" to tell passengers of a "small increase averaging 3.1 percent" in unregulated single and period return fares, without mentioning that unregulated fares also rose by an average 7 percent in January. Magnanimously it trumpeted that season and saver tickets "are not increased" – no, because they're regulated by the government which raises them by more than inflation every January. The government doesn't however regulate *when* saver tickets are valid, so ACC banned them before 9.30am. Passengers needing to travel before 9.30 must now buy ACC's unregulated tickets… the ones that had that "small increase" of 3.1 percent on top of the 7 percent it didn't mention.

SHORTLY before going belly-up last summer, London's Metronet consortium refused to tell the *Eye* what formal safety qualifications its director of safety and assurance, Ian Prosser, held. A letter from within Metronet management claimed he had none (*Eye* 1187).

Prosser has now been appointed director of railway safety at the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), which shed more light on his credentials. It explained that he's spent 26 years in "safety critical industries" and entered the rail industry eight years ago when he joined Amey Rail.

The ORR is familiar with Amey Rail, one of Network Rail's engineering contractors. In September 2006 the ORR announced Amey Rail had been fined £300,000 for the derailment of a train travelling at 120mph through Southall, west London. The derailed train continued for two miles, over a viaduct and past an oncoming train, but fortunately none of its 450 passengers was injured. That accident happened in November 2002, when Prosser was Amey Rail's technical director.

STAGECOACH boss Brian Souter has been telling BBC Radio Scotland his ideas to alleviate poverty: a tax on those who are creating carbon – "and those who aren't using carbon would be the beneficiaries," he said. "That would effectively redistribute some wealth in society."

If he were really interested in redistributing wealth, perhaps Souter (who with his sister Ann Gloag is estimated to have amassed a £720m fortune since bus deregulation in 1986) should look at bus fare increases.

In London, where Stagecoach doesn't run buses, all kinds of people use them; but outside the capital the poor are much more likely than affluent people to take the bus. There was thus an outcry when Stagecoach increased fares in Barrow-in-Furness by 8 percent in February, the fourth local fare rise in three years. Barrow is the 29th most deprived of England's 354 districts, and Stagecoach has an unregulated near monopoly of bus services there.

PS: Souter worships at Perth's Church of the Nazarene, which describes itself as a community of people who "strive to express the compassion of Jesus Christ to all persons along with our personal commitment to Christ-like living". Presumably when Souter's in the congregation the pastor skips the bits in Mark, Matthew and Luke where Christ says: "Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."

'Dr B Ching'

Down on the Farm

A MIGHTY row is raging behind the scenes in Brussels over a proposed EU directive on the "sustainable use of pesticides", the effect of which would be to prohibit up to 85 percent of the chemicals used to combat the damage caused to crops by pest diseases, insects and weeds.

It might seem odd for this column to appear to be lining up in support of pesticide manufacturers. For years we have highlighted the human health disaster caused by the reckless use of toxic chemicals such as those used in organo-phosphate sheep dip, approved by regulators as safe to use. No one can deny that the flawed system of pesticide regulation has done immense damage.

Equally, however, it cannot be denied that pesticides and herbicides have made a huge contribution to increasing crop yields. And one can only admire the timing of the EU in choosing the moment when the world faces its worst food shortage for decades to propose a ban on the use of the vast majority of pesticidal chemicals. A ban, say many experts, would result in a massive drop in yields.

According to the Pesticides Safety Directorate, the banning of triazole alone would remove "the foundation stone of control programmes for the major disease of wheat in the UK – septoria – with the potential to reduce yields by as much as 30 percent".

Scientists from seven countries recently warned the EU that its planned reduction in the range of pesticides would "increase resistance of pests and make the cultivation in Europe of many crops, including grapes, wheat, barley, cotton, fruit, potatoes and vegetables, uncompetitive". In fact, such is the EU's influence, as the world's major food importer, that not only European farmers would experience a disastrous reduction in yields. Dozens of countries which derive income from exporting foodstuffs to the EU would also be affected, resulting in a drastic slump in their earnings.

It is all very well for the European Commission and MEPs, heavily influenced by green lobby groups, to insist that it is the EU's solemn duty "to ban the use of all potentially cancer-inducing pesticides", as it was put by the London-trained lawyer Androulla Vassiliou, wife of Cyprus's former president, now the EU's health commissioner. But ranged against her are not only many commercial and farming bodies but also a phalanx of scientists, such as the agro-chemist quoted by the BBC who said: "Everybody's jaws fell to the floor once we realised the implications, which appear not to have been based on the science at all."

On 19 May the EU was expected to approve the directive. In fact, so great was the opposition from member states, it was forced to postpone its decision. For the moment, the thought of slashing the world's food production by 30 percent, just when it is running short of food, did not seem a totally brilliant idea.

'Muckspreader'

ECO-LIES

Trendy cities

THE advertising world loves spotting new trends so it knows what to sell us next year. Agency folk wait with bated breath to learn of the "next big thing", helped by a trend-watching firm, appropriately called Trendwatching.com.

The company's website puffs its brilliance, "scanning the globe for the most promising consumer trends, insights and related hands-on business ideas. For the latest and greatest, we rely on our network of 8,000+ spotters in more than 70 countries worldwide".

Amazingly, the latest "trend" spotted by these visionaries is, er, the environment. Its current briefing bulletin is all about what the firm calls "exciting ECO-ICONIC" brand trends. One trend that hasn't escaped its beady eye is the development of eco-cities. In particular, the Dongtan project, a new green icon planned for the island of Chongming near Shanghai, and one of John Prescott's favourite housing developments, being run by ARUP, the UK engineering giant.

As the trend-watchers note, Dongtan is "planned to open by the time the Expo 2010 opens in Shanghai. It will house 50,000 residents, while by 2040, the city is slated to be one-third the size of Manhattan with a population of 500,000. Dongtan will produce its own energy from wind, solar, bio-fuel and recycled city waste, and – in order to reduce its impact on the environment – will only allow hydrogen-fuelled or renewable-energy-fuelled cars on its streets."

Sadly, the trend-watchers seem unaware that since the Dongtan project was announced, very little has happened. A recent independent report compared the project's progress with Masdar, another eco-city initiative in Abu Dhabi. It makes interesting reading. The report noted that despite huge media hype around Dongtan, "to date there has been no construction activity since plans were launched over three years ago… Dongtan is still on the drawing board". But it may be a blessing this "eco-iconic" project is going nowhere. The development threatens pristine wetlands and the migratory birds they house.

But what does that matter to ARUP, who thanks to endorsements from now ex-politicians like Prescott and Ken Livingstone, now have excellent connections to the Chinese government. In return for keeping the Dongtan eco-myth alive in the media, ARUP has won numerous contracts in China, including less green (and more visible) projects like airports and skyscrapers. So the real trend to watch is the continued practice of large companies promoting their "green" credentials to win political connections and new business whilst doing bugger all. Iconic indeed.

■ROTTEN BOROUGHS■

SLOUGH OF DESPOND

ONE council which bucked the trend on 1 May was Slough, where Labour retook control, narrowly defeating a coalition of Tories, Lib Dems and independents. Yet with Labour's talent for conjuring disaster from a hat, within a fortnight the party came within a whisker of losing it again, thanks to a combination of clashing egos, ambition and lack of principle – spiced up with a pinch of racial animosity.

Slough's Labour group is made up of six white councillors and 17 Asians, mainly Muslim. After 1 May the leader of the Labour group, Rob Anderson, appointed an all-white cabinet, one of whom was only elected on 1 May. This did not go down well. Particularly put-out was Cllr Pervez Choudrey, who claimed that 15 Labour councillors really wanted *him* as their leader.

Such a man of principle is Cllr Choudrey that, at the invitation of Tory leader "Lady" Diana Coad, he crossed the floor and joined the Conservatives, taking two other Labour councillors, Mohammed Rasib and Sukhjit Dhaliwal, with him. Coad set about boasting that Labour had lost control of the council. Alas two days later Rasib and Dhaliwal decided they didn't like being Tories after all, and returned to Labour.

Labour eventually took power at a rowdy annual meeting on 15 May; Tory leader Coad stalked out in a huff and police were called because one councillor claimed to have received a death threat from the public gallery. The dignity of democracy! (*See Nooks & Corners, p 14)*

PULLING THE PLUG

THEY'VE levelled hundreds of playing fields. Now councils are queuing to fill in the swimming pools, leaving Britain's increasingly porky population with even fewer places to exercise.

Dumfries and Galloway council spent £17.2m on the "DG One" leisure complex which has just opened eight months late. How long it will remain open is anyone's guess, as the council has admitted it got its sums wrong, the centre having an inbuilt deficit of £250,000 a year which will wreck the council's budget. Last December, two months after the DG One was supposed to have opened, the council closed a popular pool that, it claimed, had "life expired".

Last September **Harlow** council in Essex announced the Harlow pool was closing "temporarily" but would reopen. In November an internal report concluded it pool had "fallen into disrepair" and should close for good. In December councillors voted to demolish it and build 60 homes on the site.

In January **Sedgemoor** council in Somerset decided to close the Burnham-on-Sea swimming pool despite packed public protest meetings and a petition signed by thousands. Thirty-four homes will be built on the site.

In February, **Aberdeen** city council voted to close the art deco Bon Accord baths, which last year was described on the council's website as "one of the most popular swimming pools in Aberdeen". Six months on, however, it is "not fit for purpose".

In March Tory **Fylde** borough council in Lancashire voted to close the St Annes pool in July and the Kirkham pool in 2009. The 10 schools currently using St Annes will have to take swimming off the curriculum. In a parish poll 3,040 local residents voted to keep the pool open and 15 voted to close it – a fact which cuts no ice whatsoever with council leader John Coombes.

●BORIS JOHNSON made much of his planning policies during the London mayoral election, stating his intention to "help people on low incomes with a variety of financial keys to the doors". Hurrah!

But, as *Eye* 1210 reported, Sir Simon Milton, Shirley Porter's protégé and the leader of Westminster council, has been appointed as BoJo's senior planning adviser. If his council's treatment of 11 former council tenants in Paddington is anything to go by, Londoners "on low incomes" should beware.

Westminster stands to make millions from its share of the development of luxury flats in Paddington Basin. In the way stands Dudley House, a block of former council flats occupied mainly by oldies who bought their homes under the Tories' "right to buy" scheme in the 1980s and 90s. Eleven households are still in residence, Westminster having "decanted" the remaining tenants and bought out the other owner-occupiers. In their almost deserted, blighted block, the residents have no hope of getting a decent price for their homes on the open market and face having to accept whatever the council offers, or submit to compulsory purchase.

Twenty years ago Dame Shirley bribed would-be Tory voters with cheap "right-to-buy" homes; now elderly right-to-buyers are being kicked out because they're in the way of developers. Funny how things come full circle.

SUNK IN THE LAKES

CRAPITA is at last to cough up a £350,000 penalty after failing to deliver 1,000 promised new jobs in Carlisle, despite being given an extra two years to meet the target.

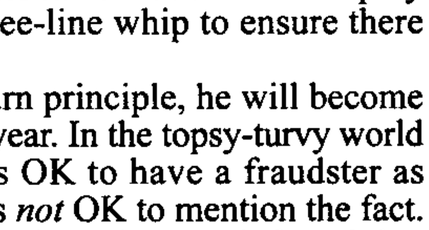
Cumbria county council farmed out its successful design and business services dept in 2001 after reaching the legal limit of external contracts it could take on as a public body. In return for the business, Capita pledged to create 1,000 new jobs by January 2006. For every job not created it would pay a £1,000 penalty.

In 2006, *Eye* 1160 reported how Capita had badly missed its target, with just 219 jobs created. But rather than claiming its £781,000 to spend on council services,

Cumbria agreed to extend the contract till 2009. Now, with time running out once more and only 575 jobs created, Crapita has cheekily offered an "early settlement" of just £350,000.

Outsourcing firms such as Crapita often win business from councils with promises of "new" jobs. But such jobs are not always what they seem. A job "gained" in one place often means a job lost elsewhere. According to Westminster council's Labour opposition, the Tories under Sir Simon Milton have "exported" 477 jobs to other parts of the UK in recent years. Twenty-four jobs in housing benefit assessment, for instance, have been lost in Westminster and transferred to, er, Carlisle!

●IN *Eye* 1209 we reported how Oldham council had spent £100,000 on a brilliant new logo which consisted of a white "O" inside a pale blue circle. Reader Andy Day wondered if "the money the creative team received adequately covered the cost of visiting Wikipedia and taking a look at the roundel of Argentina's airforce", while Ant Harrison complained that we hadn't shown readers Oldham's *old* logo. So here it is: "Oldham together"? Ooh, missus!



ROTTEN PEACH

THERE's nothing wrong with appointing a convicted benefit fraudster as deputy mayor, according to Peterborough's ruling Tories.

Cllr Gul Nawaz served half of a two-month jail sentence in 2002 after being convicted with his son Akeel Ahmed of defrauding Peterborough city council of £3,000 in a housing benefit scam. Showing considerable brass neck, before his conviction he stood for the council and was elected, without telling voters Inspector Knacker was on his case. Now the Tories have made Nawaz deputy mayor, applying a three-line whip to ensure there was no dissent.

On the buggins' turn principle, he will become the city's mayor next year. In the topsy-turvy world of Pottyborough, it is OK to have a fraudster as deputy mayor, but it is *not* OK to mention the fact. When Tory council leader John Peach found that the local Peterborough *Evening Telegraph* was preparing a story last week, he absurdly demanded the paper pull it because it might "disadvantage [Nawaz]... and... may manipulate the democratic process". The *ET* told the absurd Peach to take a running jump.

●MEANWHILE a minor cabinet reshuffle at Pottyborough city council sees former DJ turned pole-dancing club owner Wayne Fitzgerald made cabinet member for the environment. An obvious job for a man who drives a gas-guzzling 23-mpg BMW X5.

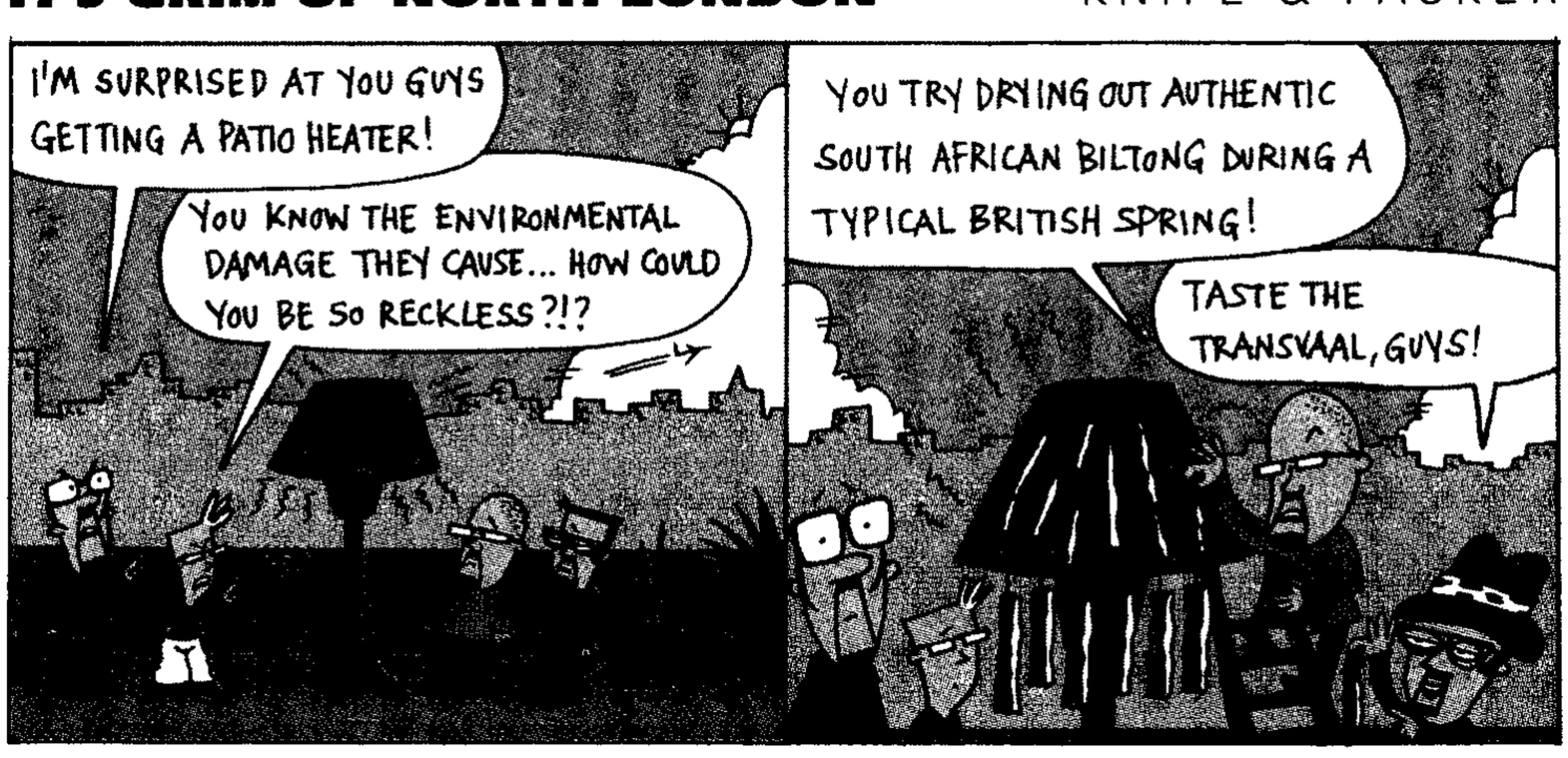
BROCK WATCH

TEN years after his "moment of madness" on Clapham Common, and five after quitting the Welsh Assembly when the *Sun* snapped him at a gay cruising area – where he claimed he had been watching badgers – the political corpse of former Welsh Secretary Ron Davies comes staggering out of the grave once more.

On 1 May he was elected as an Independent to Caerphilly borough council, while his latest wife, Lynne Hughes, was elected for Plaid Cymru in a neighbouring ward. When Labour and Plaid each won 33 seats, leaving the balance of power in the hands of the nine Independents, Ron was perfectly placed to do a deal that handed Plaid control. In return, Plaid gave him the cabinet portfolio in charge of "regeneration and countryside". The badgers of Caerphilly, at least, are in safe hands.

●QUOTE OF THE WEEK: "We've got a good bunch of journalists and it's fucking funny... It's not exactly *Private Eye* doing Rotten Boroughs, it's a fun paper." – James Brown, consultant editor of the *Daily Sport* (circulation 95,000), disses Britain's top-selling current affairs mag (circulation 207,000).

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


I'M SURPRISED AT YOU GUYS GETTING A PATIO HEATER!
YOU KNOW THE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE THEY CAUSE... HOW COULD YOU BE SO RECKLESS?!?
YOU TRY DRYING OUT AUTHENTIC SOUTH AFRICAN BILTONG DURING A TYPICAL BRITISH SPRING!
TASTE THE TRANSVAAL, GUYS!

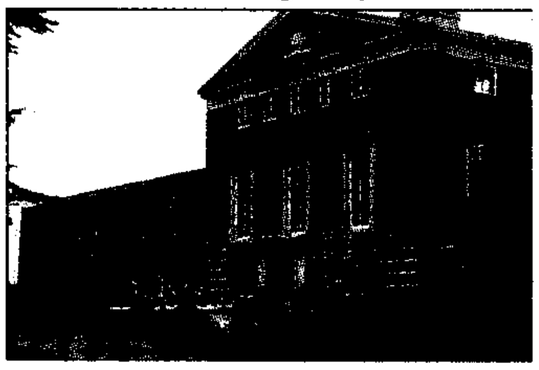
NOOKS and CORNERS

"Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough
It isn't fit for humans now..."

SO BEGINS one of the best-known poems by the sainted founder of this column, John Betjeman. Poor Slough doesn't have a very good reputation. But in truth there is little of interest in the town. In contrast to nearby Windsor 'n' Eton, all it can really boast is the Mars Bar works and other factories on the Slough Trading Estate.

Pevsner, in 1960, found that: "It is a town without tradition... and has not made efforts yet to build up any visual centre of dignity. It could have done, but has not." And then what little of interest existed in the centre was wiped out by new shopping centres and offices after 1968.

Given this, you might think Slough would cherish what little is left of any character or beauty. But no. The best building by far in Slough is the Town Hall – and the council now wants to demolish it.



The new Town Hall in Bath Road was opened in 1937, the very year Betjeman published his poem. It was an attempt to redeem Slough's reputation and give it a proper civic centre; and it was the result of a competition which attracted more than 200 entries. It was designed by C.H. James and S. Rowland Pierce, the architects of Norwich City Hall, the supreme civic building in Britain of the inter-war decades.

Slough Town Hall is a dignified, restrained design, built in brick. Pevsner liked it, even though the building wasn't Modern of the approved white concrete sort: "Neo-classical in the Swedish way, see the graceful bell-turret and the prettily framed centre windows". Unfortunately the planned wing with an assembly hall was never built, and the building never became the focus of a decent civic centre.

In February Slough council decided to relocate and demolish James & Pierce's building so the site can be sold to developers for housing, raising £14m. Keeping the Town Hall – which is in perfectly good condition and could be used for other purposes – would reduce the expected profit by £2m, so Tony Walker, a dim retired architect who acts as consultant to DLG Architects, has been hired to report that there is no conservation reason to resist demolition.

The council leader and the local MP seemed more concerned about the fate of the cedar tree in front of the Town Hall. But locally the demolition plan created outrage and the Campaign to Save Slough's Heritage, among others, has asked for the building to be listed. Even if English Heritage recommends listing, as it surely must, it remains to be seen what Margaret Hodge, Minister for Culture, Media & Sport, will do given her prejudice against protecting good 20th century buildings.

But here's a curious thing. The proposal to "blow to smithereens" Slough's best building came from the ruling coalition of Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Independents. But in the 1 May elections May, Slough voters bucked the national trend. The leader of the Conservative group lost his seat while Labour gained four seats, enabling it temporarily to retake control *[See Rotten Boroughs, p.13 for the full shenanigans]*. As the Town Hall demolition was an election issue, this may have been a vote for keeping what remains of Slough's meagre architectural heritage. If so, the people of Slough have redeemed themselves from Betjeman's diatribe – and Mrs Hodge ought to take note.

BOMBS have caused plenty of damage in Belfast in recent years, but now the Troubles seem to be over, a construction boom is threatening the historic buildings that remain.

In Eye 1175, I illustrated the astonishing scheme to mutilate the May Street Presbyterian Church, close to Belfast's splendid Edwardian City Hall. The church is a handsome Classical building dating from 1829 with its original pews and other fittings intact. It stands in the Linen Conservation Area. However, the minister, the Rev Keith Drury, thinks the only way forward for his congregation is to work with a developer, Barnabas Ventures, to replace the adjacent (listed) church hall with a 19-storey residential tower and to plonk further accommodation on top of the church itself.

The scheme by Knox & Clayton architects, of Lisburn, was so destructive it was at first difficult to take it seriously. The May Street Church was to lose its roof and the superimposed building was to be supported on columns outside its brick walls. This provoked strong objections.

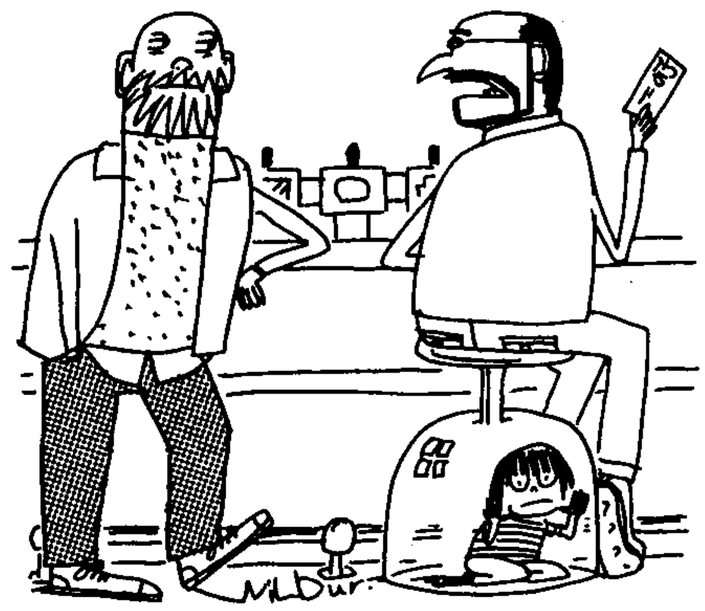
Now the egregious architects have submitted a "revised" scheme for the so-called Hope & History Centre. The only change seems to be that the proposed glass tower on top of the church has been placed on the diagonal – and now rises six rather than five storeys above the "zinc plated aerofoil canopy" which replaces the church's old roof.

Historic building legislation specifies a presumption in favour of keeping listed buildings and opposition to any development which would adversely affect the setting of a listed building and which would not enhance the character of a conservation area, so the insensitivity of this application insults the intelligence as well as poor old Belfast. In fact, the May Street Church would almost be better demolished than treated in this way – which is perhaps what Mr Drury has in mind.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Accra, Ghana*

Submitted by Mark Hucke.
£10 paid for similar submissions.
(SAE required for return of photographs)



"Personally, I've nothing against the larger glass sizes..."

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

ERWIN SCHROTT, the hitherto rising bass-baritone, appears to have walked into a heap of trouble through no fault of anyone else's.

Schrott is the Uruguyan-born hulk who starred as Covent Garden's Don Giovanni last year and made headlines less for his voice than for the way he sauntered around the stage in states of sexually provocative undress.

Female ticket sales (well, not *just* female) soared in direct proportion to the amount of clothing he removed. He ended up married to the equally provocative and sauntering songstress Anna Netrebko, who is now pregnant with their first child.

This brazen pair, not much liked in the business, have been busily turning themselves into the Posh & Becks of opera; and being hot tickets, they have been indulged. Until now. For Schrott, it seems, has messed around the Rosenblatt Recital Series once too often.

A while ago he was booked to sing in this series and cancelled for no very good reason. There was no come-back because he was a star and that's what stars do. However, he's now done it again, pulling out of a big Rosenblatt recital with the Philharmonia Orchestra that was scheduled for 11 June.

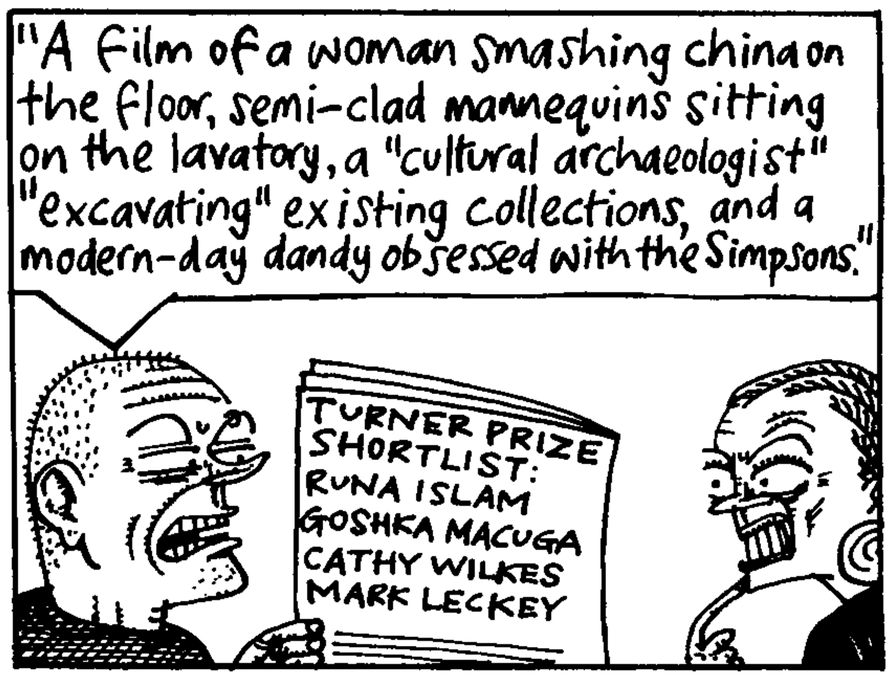
He offered no reason and no excuse, clearly thinking he'd get away with it again. But that was to ignore the fact that the Rosenblatt of the recital series is Ian Rosenblatt, an articulate and now extremely angry lawyer. Rosenblatt is not just suing Schrott: he's doing it with a vengeance.

"I'm disgusted by Mr Schrott's callous disregard to his contractual obligations," says Rosenblatt, charging the singer with "gross unprofessionalism and disrespect" and adding "cowardice" for good measure. "I can only wonder," he continues, "if he has the guts to appear on a London concert platform."

Of course if he does get the shirt off Schrott's back, many fans will be only too delighted.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH


"A film of a woman smashing china on the floor, semi-clad mannequins sitting on the lavatory, a "cultural archaeologist" "excavating" existing collections, and a modern-day dandy obsessed with the Simpsons."
TURNER PRIZE SHORTLIST:
RUNA ISLAM
GOSHKA MACUGA
CATHY WILKES
MARK LECKEY

Letters

Supa it wasn't

Sir,

You've got your African leaders' wives muddled up (Supa he ain't, Eye 1210). Graça (not Gracia) Machel DBE is the elegant and distinguished wife of Nelson Mandela, having formerly been First Lady of Mozambique as the consort of that country's late president, Samora Machel.

Meanwhile, Grace (aka "Gucci Grace") Mugabe (née Marufu) is the current "First Shopper" of Zimbabwe.

CHRIS GREENWAY,

Via email.

● *Thank you for the dozens of letters pointing out this careless error. Apologies for having let it slip through the net. Ed.*

Remote Controller zapped

Sir,

... Remote Controller excoriates the BBC for having made a non-political nature documentary about China.

Quite right! China may be a vast, ancient, complex and, yes, beautiful land, but the conduct of its present government is the only legitimate subject matter.

*I'm off to watch **The Nature of Britain**, in which Alan Titchmarsh rails against detention without charge and the curtailment of the right to protest.*

GEORGE MACKIE.

*... I too share Remote Controller's disappointment at the lack of coverage given to China's human rights abuses in **Wild China** (Eye 1202) but I fear this problem is under reported. While watching Bill Oddie's Wild Side I failed to note any mention of Iraq, 42 day detentions, Asbos or binge drinking.*

MARK ROBINSON (Project Engineer, Wehrle Environmental).

*... I agree with Remote Controller that BBC's **Wild China** has in parts been a bit tame (including some of the "wild" life featured). However, his outrage at the lack of political content seems frankly bizarre. Would he suggest that any programme on American wildlife that does not include a reference to Guantanamo Bay is "sycophantic"? Must every feature on kangaroos be "balanced" by a reminder of the sufferings of the aborigines? Does he think every time David Attenborough is filmed stroking a British vole the commentary should remind us that British forces occupy parts of Iraq? If not, why does he take this hysterical view of China? China is a country of more than 1.3 billion people; most of them are not dying from pollution or actively oppressing anyone. I believe the same is true of the wildlife.*

TERRY JORDAN.

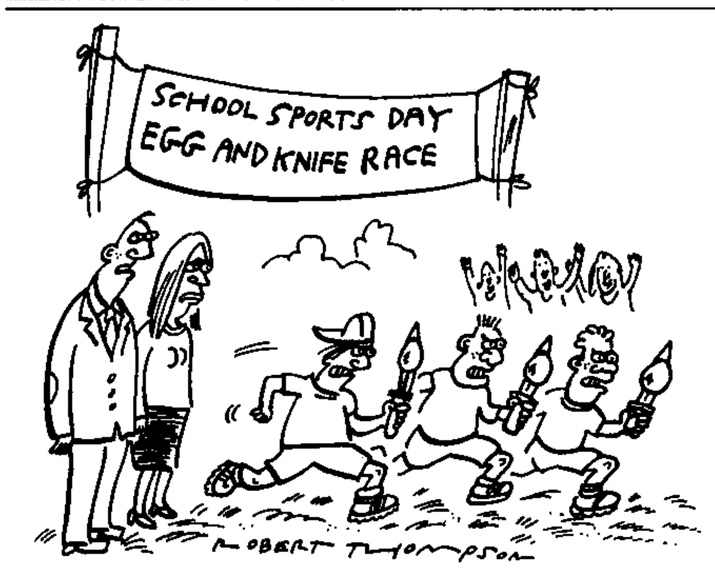
Medicine Balls balls

Sir,

MD makes a misdiagnosis at least as serious as the blunders he lays at the door of the Weston Super Mare treatment centre. That Treatment Centre is in fact wholly owned and operated by the NHS, not by the independent sector. Indeed, the latest study carried out by the highly respected BMC Health Services Research organisation finds that Independent Sector Treatment Centres achieve patient outcomes which are better than the NHS for the majority of procedures, and the same for the remainder, even allowing for what some see as a less case challenging "case mix". MD needs to go back to medical school and catch up on the merits of accurate, evidence based diagnosis.

Kind regards,
DAVID WORSKETT,

Director, NHS Partner Network.



"Yes, most kids carry one these days..."

Present laughter

Sir,

Re: Chris Padley's observations (Eye 1209) concerning M. Barg's incessant use of the present tense when discussing historical events.

Recently, having switched on halfway through a Radio 4 programme, I heard the following: "Catholics in Ireland are taking up arms again after a series of Protestant attacks on people and property. There is widespread unrest blah blah..." Thinking, stupidly perhaps, that this was breaking news I listened for a minute or two before I realised that the idiot presenting the programme was talking about events in the 19th century.

Yours,
DEREK TYSON,

Tuffley, Gloucester.

PF-Eyetie

Sir,

I must take issue with your assessment of Mussolini's version of PFI as "one of (his) barmier ideas". It was actually a very sensible idea when compared to, say, his decision to join in an unlawful war in order to keep in with a bigger, more aggressive and better-armed ally.

Fortunately, the latter has no parallel in recent British political history.

ANDREW McCRACKEN,

Via email.

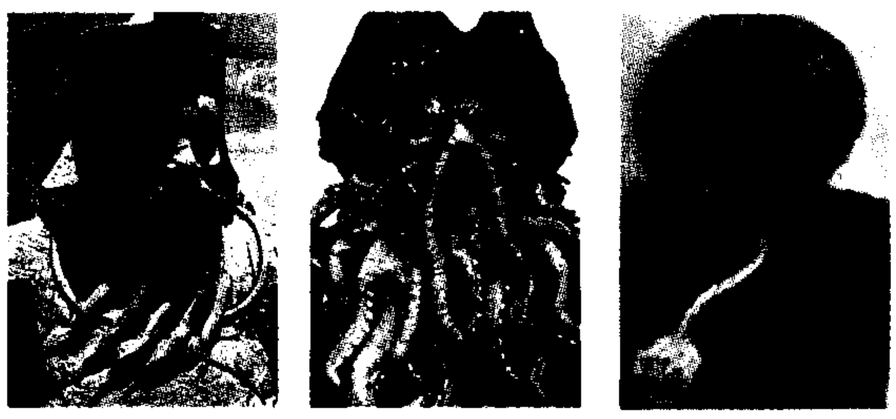
Lookalike

Sir,

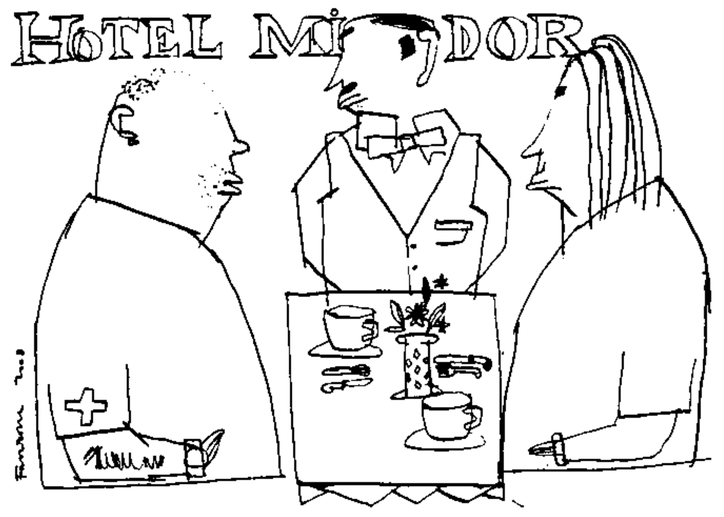
I was recently in Bangkok and was struck by the similarity between a statue outside the Golden Palace and the Action Figure of Bill Nighy's character from Pirates of the Caribbean. I then discover today a contentious, copyright-busting knitted Ood from what I understand to be a popular television programme called Doctor Who! Perchance related? Etc etc.

Sincerely,
ERNIE WOOD,

Via email.



Scenes You Seldom See



"Not the full English, mate. Just coffee, croissants and some slices of cheese..."

Horse sense

Sir,

Re: Picture Postcards, Eye 1210.

Not quite sure whether this item was humorously intended or not (Yes. Ed.), but the images used are somewhat misleading. Recommendations of maximum load for draft equines put forward by the ILPH (International League for the Protection of Horses), the Brooke Hospital, and American and South African equine research units are that a towed load should not exceed twice the weight of the animal. A typical donkey or small horse in good condition would be approximately 400kg in weight, giving a maximum safe towing weight of 800kg. The vehicles shown are a Toyota Landcruiser which in standard specification would have a gross vehicle weight in excess of 2800kg, although in UN spec it will be rather more than this, and an Iveco tipper truck with a minimum GVW of 16000kg. That the photographs are mock-ups is clear, what is less clear is your reason for using them.

Yours, befuddled,
MATT TUCKER,

Birmingham.

Sir,

Was the "Picture Postcards" feature (Eye 1210) intended for the Ad Nauseam section of your publication? Lumping it with the news suggests that you might have swallowed the claim that a horse (and not much of one at that) can pull a large UNRWA lorry round Gaza. Indeed the feature might have done better "In The Back" with an exposé on why the UNRWA is advocating staged publicity shoots with its vehicles. Indeed, if you do decide to continue with a section of preposterous photographs and outrageous media manipulation, I'm sure the Palestinian Authority could provide enough material for a fortnightly column.

Yours awaiting misinformed self-righteous British vitriol,

ANTON GOODMAN,

Jerusalem.

"Oi! Are you looking at my turd?"

Lookalike

Fayed

Westwood

Sir,

Seeing "John Portsmouth Football Club Westwood" at the FA Cup Final on Saturday reminded me of another equally colourful supporter of the "Beautiful Game". Are they by any chance related?

Sincerely,
BOB MCLACHLAN,

Jersey.

Axles to grind

Sir,

Whatever the theory surrounding the motion of bendy-buses, the reality is that they are more dangerous. According to Transport for London (TfL) data, bendy-buses "are involved in 2.62 collisions with cyclists per million miles, compared with 0.97 for other buses. And they have 153 accidents per million miles, compared with only 87 per million on non-bendy routes," (ThisIsLondon, 7-6-2007).

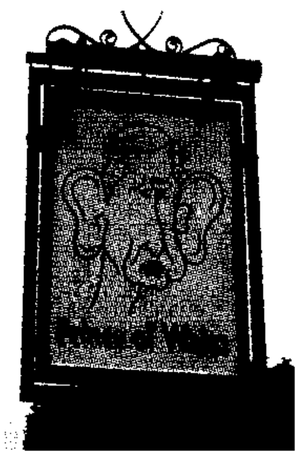
Yours sincerely,
IVAN VIEHOFF,

Chalfont St Giles.

... Mr Philip Nice, in Letters (Issue 1210), mentions long trains being able to travel on the same tracks as short ones to illustrate his point about bendy buses and vehicles with trailers. This is a bad example as road vehicles have axles fitted to their main bodies and longer trains do not. They use moveable bogies fitted to their bodies to which the axles are fitted. It is these bogies that follow the track and allow the longer trains to use the same tracks as the shorter trains.

DAVID MARTIN.

Modern Inn Signs



Sir,

Our local pub, the Prince of Wales, of 1 Mill Road, Marlow, SL7 1PX, always used to have a sign featuring the familiar three feathers and an "Ich Dien" inscription. Recently however it has been changed to the attached. Any offers as to how long they'll get away with it? I am sure your readership would appreciate being shown it.

MARK BILLINGTON,

Via email.

LUVVIES

"We look at it as this incredible way to kick off this adventure and then we get to bring it home to America, to its birthplace, and to the city that we love, the 5th lady in the movie, and so we think of it as the exclamation point at the end of a glorious sentence."

SARAH JESSICA-PARKER
on the London premiere of *Sex and the City* film,
BBC News

Submitted by Keith Littlejohn.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Green with ennui

Sir,

Honoured as I am that Private Eye has decided to call its green news column "Eco Worrier", the same name as my column in the Body&Soul section of the Saturday Times and my blog (www.timesonline.co.uk/ecoworrier), I am surprised.

Are they, perhaps, related? I, at least, should be told. However, I console myself with the fact that imitation is, as they say, the sincerest form of flattery. As I'm sure you at Private Eye will agree when I start my new column next week, "Funny Green World".

ANNA SHEPARD,

Via email.

● *Oops! See the Eye's fab new column Eco-Lies (geddit?), p. 12. Ed.*

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

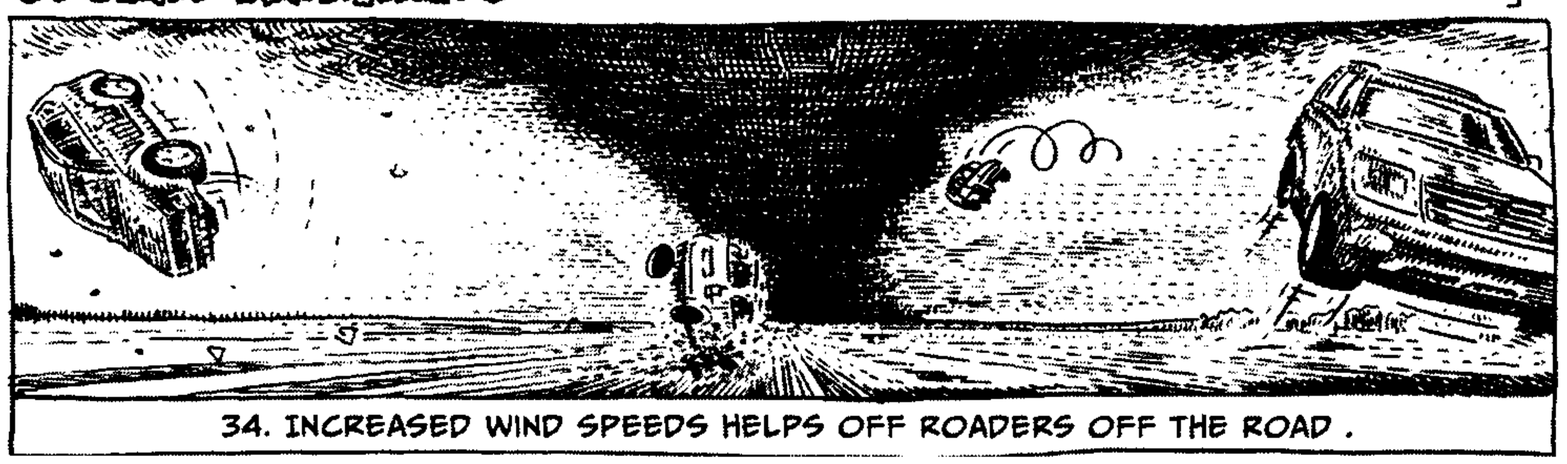
"Such disappointment etched across the body language of the Carlisle players..."
CONOR McNAMARA, Radio 5 Live
(Gary Harding)

"Everybody is standing behind everyone else."
ROBIN JACKMAN, Setanta Sports
(Patrick Stoddart)

"He [Lucian Freud] is a living artist, so you could say he's not even dead yet."
ANDREA CATHERWOOD, Radio 5 Live
(Jenny Billingsley)

"... He took his bat away posthumously."
HENRY BLOFELD, Radio 4
(Dick Bluer)

"Wigan throw a dice into the roulette wheel of the final day of the Premiership..."
IVAN GASKELL, BBC
(John Bassett)



"I see your Charlene's been visiting Balmoral again!"

Pedantry Corner

... Whether Steve Wakefield's letter should be in Pedants Cor'ner or not – it is. However, after criticising the inaccurate naming of the late owners of Newark Works, Bath (which I wrote to you to correct) he then goes on to get it wrong . They were Stothert & Pitt, who not only made cranes but vast array of mechanical devices of the type which we now import from other EU members.

W.J. HOUSTON.

... Clive Dixon is correct to state that Aramaic is not a lineal descendant of Hebrew ('Pedants Corner, Eye 1209). However, the assumption that Aramaic was the spoken vernacular in first century Israel is only a hypothesis, albeit one held by the majority of scholars. There is a significant minority of scholars who hold that Hebrew was still the common spoken language in the first century.

Furthermore, it is anachronistic to speak of "Palestine" in the 1st century. The Jews called the country "Israel" and the Romans named the province "Judaea". The name "Palestine" was not coined until the 2nd century when Hadrian re-named the province following the unsuccessful second revolt under Bar Kokhba.

DANIEL LANDSBERGER.

... You unmilitary lot are clueless about Royal Air Force ranks. "Fg Off" has for countless years been the official abbreviation for the rank of Flying Officer, which Wales is. He is not a Flight Officer, which used to be a female rank.

ERNIE TODD (Who used to be a Fg Off, but took more than 13 weeks to earn his flying badge).

... Andrew Richards (Pedants Cor'ner, Eye 1210) suggests in his contribution to the "a building needs a roof" polemic that the Coliseum in Rome and Wembley Stadium in London do not have roofs. They clearly do. In fact the movable 6,350 tonne roof at Wembley is one of the key features of its design and the 2,618 toilets are all under cover. The confusion is due to the roofs not covering the main arenas (although Wembley has a roof that covers some of it....).

XAVIER ILES.

"So the Coliseum in Rome... are not buildings?" (Andrew Richards). Inadequately pedantic: the building in Rome is called the Colosseum. There are Coliseums (Colisea?) in St. Martin's Lane, London, and elsewhere.

DUGALD BARR.

... Why not just rename the offending item to "Pedantry Corner" and be done with it?

JAMES McDERMOTT.

● *Terrible idea. It won't work. Ed.*

Letter from **Phnom Penh**

from Our Own Correspondent

CAMBODIA doesn't have a great track record competing with the world's best. So we can take some pride at the weird lengths we are going to to make sure the trials of Khmer Rouge suspects accused of the deaths of millions rank alongside the pitiful progress of international tribunals on Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Bosnia.

Currently on show is former KR head of state Khieu Samphan, who unlike most of his fellow defendants may actually be innocent of the charge of genocide. Not that it really matters when the pre-trial bail hearing has just been suspended indefinitely while 16,000 documents are translated into English and French. By the time this has been done, Khieu and most of his chums will probably have shuffled off their mortal coils anyway.

The latest glitch came after Khieu's French lawyer Jacques Vergès (for it is he! "The Devil's Advocate" of Carlos the Jekyll and Klaus Barbie, Butcher of Lyon, fame) announced that he could not formulate a case because not enough documents had been translated into his native tongue. He felt "looked down upon" by the court and is refusing to participate until the problem is rectified. Despite the fact Vergès has had four months to prepare his position, so agonised was he by the situation he could not bring himself to mention it until the morning of the hearing, prompting an adjournment and calls of foul play from victims' groups and observers.

To be fair to Vergès, the translation problem was well known and in some ways inviting such a manoeuvre from the defence. The Khmer Rouge meticulously documented the death of every prisoner, and many records have been preserved. Having lots of evidence, you may think, is a good thing. How naïve! With three official languages – alas, our native Khmer was deemed unfit for an international tribunal – and a pitiful translation budget, some feel a fair trial was always going to be elusive. Internal memos show the trial's head of translation raised the problem but was ignored – no wonder he has resigned, leaving the trial with no qualified legal translators.

This is just the latest hold-up. Who can forget the legal wrangling over the height of the judges' chairs or, indeed, the near-total lack of cooperation from the current government and our leader, Hun Sen? Lest we forget, Hun Sen was a KR commander himself, but as the Maoist ship was sinking he leapt over the border to Vietnam, ingratiated himself with our eastern neighbours and was installed by them as our PM back in 1985. Surely his reluctance for the trial to go ahead is unrelated to the possibility of some of the murkier aspects of his multi-coloured past being dredged up?

But even Hun Sen and his cronies could not stave off the trial – international pressure (not to mention millions of dollars of kickbacks for local officials) won through – mostly from the French, who were keen to preserve some political influence in the region, and the Japanese, who have crossed their kimonos that the Chinese will end up implicated in the genocide (Nanking Massacre, anyone?). And so it came to pass that the Khmer Rouge Trials, or the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) to be more accurate, was created by the UN.

Thus, here we are with time ticking on the ECCC's three-year mandate, its mandarins again left promising a speedy solution and quietly resigning. It seems we Cambodians might still have to wait a while for the great catharsis we are told our country so desperately needs. But at least we can be comforted by the thought that the hard-pressed lawyers in the case are getting their way.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "We have no objection to massage parlours that offer traditional Javanese style massage," police spokesman Iman Suryono told reporters in Batu, "but we have to protect our town's reputation. Many women in these 'panti pijat' parlours also offer 'plus-plus' and 'very happy ending' to their male customers, and this has to stop. Our plan is to fit loyalty corsets to all female workers, so in future there will be a barrier to illicit practices, and only therapeutic massages will be possible. There are lightweight Kevlar models available nowadays, as well as traditional plate-metal versions, and this new law will improve public morality, because we all know how naughty some clients can be."

Meuthia Hatta, the Minister for Women's Empowerment, expressed concern over the proposed legislation. "It's not the right way to prevent promiscuity," she insisted. "These so-called loyalty corsets are really chastity belts, and they insult women, as if they are the ones in the wrong. They are degrading, because a masseuse has to ask her boss to remove her padlock whenever she needs to answer a call of nature. Anyway, if chastity belts really are necessary, why not insist that clients wear a male version before the massage can begin?" *(Express India, 10/4/08. Spotter: Nick Burgoyne)*

– ● –

● *"Most of our volunteers are doctors and teachers," Georgina Gomez told visitors to the Body Worlds exhibition in St. Louis, "professionals who want to help others. But we've also had bodybuilders who say 'I have a great body – I want to put it on display'. We explain to them that we may unravel their intestines, put their brains in their hands, or sit their flayed body atop a horse, but that doesn't seem to bother them. We've already had hundreds of requests for more information about body donation, although so far only a handful have completed all the legal paperwork."*

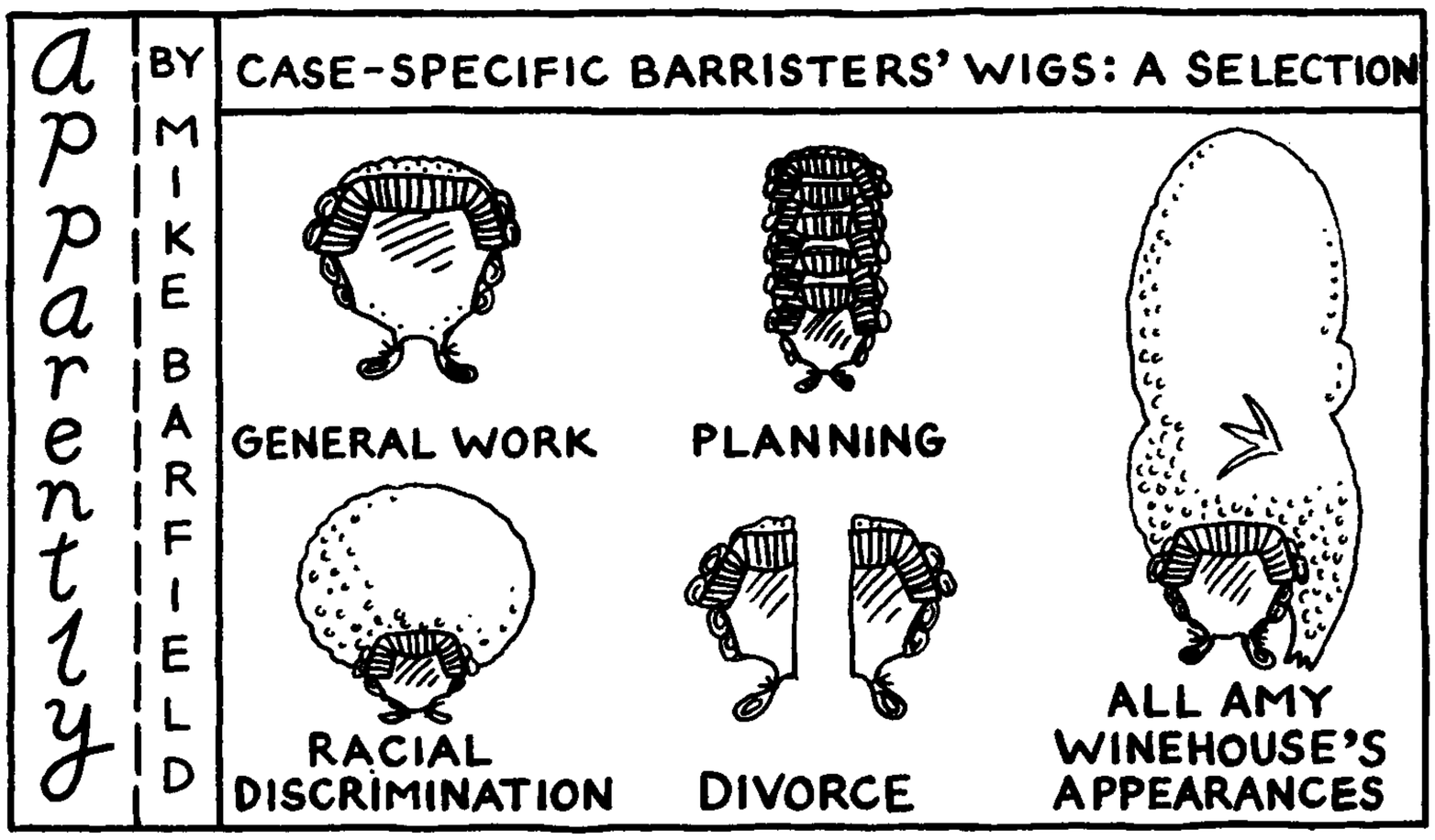
Forty-one-year-old Jim Bildeback then explained why he had volunteered to have his body plastinated and displayed after his death. "I have no desire to be immortal," he commented, "my real goal is educational. Cadavers are gray and rubbery, and not much use as a learning tool. But once the skin is removed, and the soluble fats and bodily fluids are replaced with fluid plastics, you can learn much more about anatomy. I have no wish to be buried in the ground in an expensive casket, and I don't care what they do with my body, although I hope I won't be used as a cautionary tale. I don't smoke and rarely drink, so perhaps they'll show off my vascular system. I think it's in pretty good shape." (St Louis Post-Dispatch, 22/1/08. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)

– ● –

● "As long as this park has existed, we've been allowed to let our pets run freely," dog owners protested at a rally in Amsterdam's Vondelpark, "but this new legislation will change all that. The council say they're promoting an 'anything goes' policy here, but all sorts of activities will now be prohibited. You can be fined if you let your dog off the leash, if it makes a mess, if you erect a tent, or play a percussion instrument, or ride a moped through the park. But what's truly outrageous is that we will be punished for exercising our dogs, while other people will be encouraged to have sex in public."

Defending the council's decision to permit public sex in the Vondelpark, Alderman Paul Van Grieken told reporters "Why should we ban something that is impossible to ban, which causes little bother to others, and for a certain group signifies much pleasure? Of course

there are strict rules attached. Condoms must be cleared away, sex is restricted to evenings and night-times, and must never take place near children's playgrounds. Cruising is also permitted, so long as it does not offend others, but strict fines will be imposed on anyone who lets their dog off the leash. It is important to protect standards." *(NIS News [Netherlands], 8/3/08. Spotter: G.T. Spencer)*



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 21

From the Recovery Ward (formerly bedside) of the Supreme Leader

(Solemn, But Restful Music)

Comrades!

May I begin by thanking all of you for your condolences over my recent unfortunate indisposition, and may I take this opportunity to reassure you that I am now fully restored to full vigour and fully able to resume all my full range of responsibilities as your Supreme Leader.

I will not seek to pretend that there have not been some recent setbacks. There haven't.

We may have lost the odd election in distant parts of this great country, and perhaps if I had been well enough to go to Crewe myself it would have been a different story.

But I was under strict spin-doctor's orders to keep away from that unhealthy town, and to allow Comrade Hoon to take full responsibility for this crushing defeat. Which it wasn't.

But these small hiccups do not affect the real business of government, which goes on. In fact, I have made over 300 announcements only today setting out my long-term agenda to take our great party forward into the Age of No Change.

Space does not allow me to list all the 300 initiatives in full, let alone the 300 more I will be announcing tomorrow, and indeed the 300 further initiatives that I will be launching every day for many months to come, in a series of rolling television interviews with such highly-respected interlocutors such as Comrade Marr, Comrade Frost and Comrades Ant and Dec.

But let me single out one or two of the highlights of my new Five-Year Plan for Britain.

- a "deep-clean" for all schools to eliminate all superbugs including SATs, SatNavs, GCSEs and Q.Diff or *questions difficile*.
- a "deep fry" for all Mars bars given to children as part of my government's new health initiative.
- abortions for terror suspects to be increased to 42 weeks to give our security authorities the chance to shoot them in the privacy of their own home.
- an airport for every home in Britain, as part of our Green initiative.
- state trial of Madame Blair, wife of the hated and discredited former leader, for the following crimes: sedition, treason, insurrection, revolt and hurtful and wholly unwarranted rudeness shown to the present Supreme Leader, punishable by death.

These are just a handful of the initiatives that will mark out the rise of neo-Brownite Brownism from the ashes of Crewe. Not that there was a fire. Like a phoenix, the workers and intellectuals of Britain will drive the armies of the Cameronite-Osbornist toff tendency into the dustbin of history.

And for any Comrades who are thinking of wavering in their support for their Supreme Leader in this vital hour, let me remind them of the immortal words of the great former leader, Comrade Major, writing in his little Grey Book, "Back me or I stay."

No. There can be no doubt now that I am the right man to lead Britain into a recession.

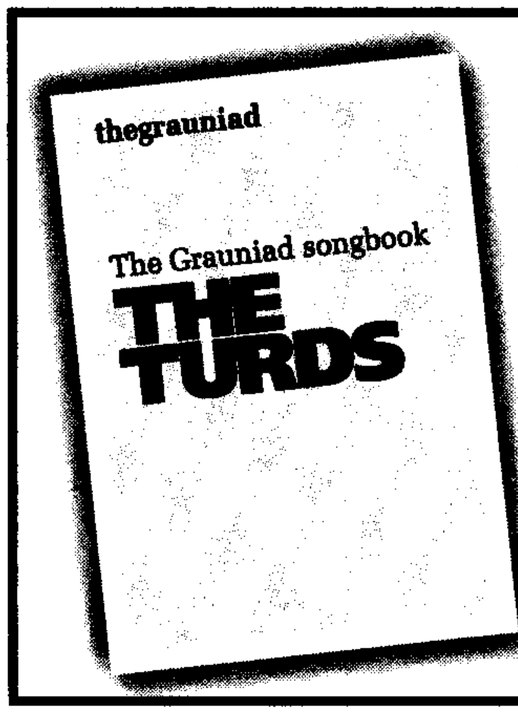
Signed Gordon Brown

The Supreme Invalid (from his deathbed)

COURTROOM BATTLE LOOMS OVER DISPUTED WILL

by Our Legal Staff **Joshua Rozenbeard**

FASHIONABLE London was rocked to its foundations by the news of an impending multi-million pound legal marathon involving the will of the late Sir Mark Burlington-Bertie, the nightclub owner who died last year of terminal boredom, leaving his entire estate, including the ultra-smart Berkeley Square nightclub Brillo's (named after his first wife Lady Annabrill Fishpaste, the second wife of Sir Jonah Marmite, the billionaire "gambling grocer") to his daughter Indonesia Burlington-Arcade, deliberately bypassing his estranged son Robin Burlington-Crescent, who now alleges that, at the time his father made the will, he was suffering from aristocratic dementia, a condition which afflicts many elderly members of the upper classes, causing them out of spite to make death-bed adjustments to their bequests, leading to very long articles in all the newspapers, which cause many members of the public to hope that every penny of the family's inheritance should end up going to where it rightly belongs, ie the hands of the legal profession *(Shurely shome mishtake? Ed.)*



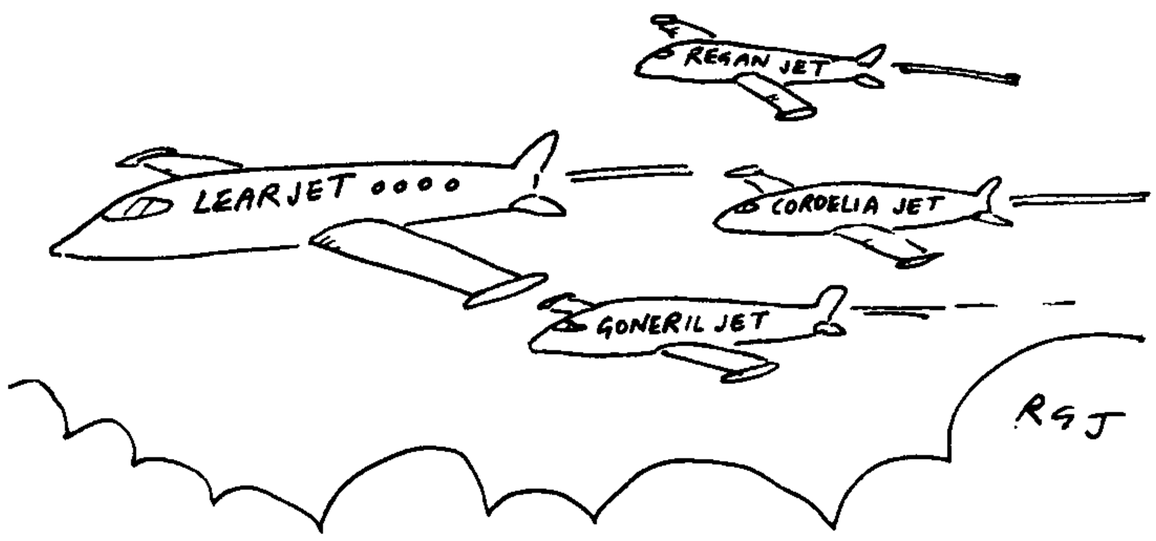
FREE!!

Verse 1

Lay down your arms,
Throw them in the air,
Love is the thing,
Hate isn't.

© Sir Spigismond Topes 1967

From the legendary album
'I'm A Red Hot Swinging Perve'



Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

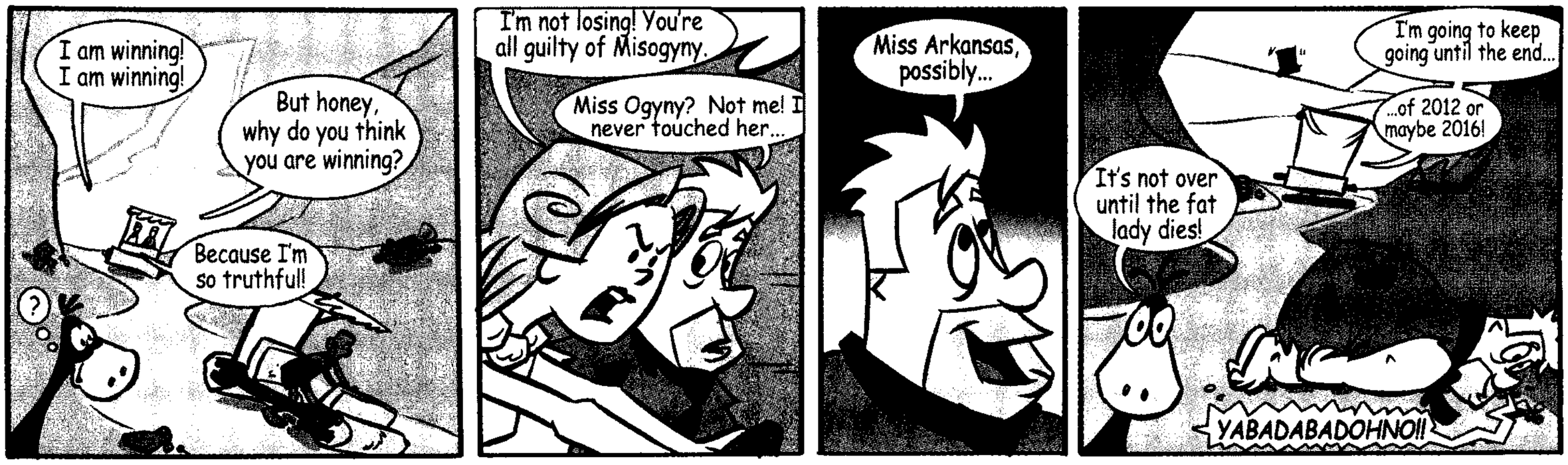
WHY DO GORDON'S GANG ALWAYS PORTRAY US WEARING TOP HATS AND TAILCOATS ?
SNOOTY IS POSH
IT'S JOLLY UNFAIR !!!
...BECAUSE IN THE SUMMER ONE WEARS A BLAZER AND BOATER !!!
WHAT A FRIGHTFUL OIKY CREWE, EH READERS ?!?
DAVE'S GOT THE COMMON TOUCH - WITH SNOBS ON !
ONE HAD IT JOLLY TOFF, ONE DID
TUGGED FORELOCK

THE BROON-ITES

TH' CABINET ARE DIVIDED PA BROON...
...THEY CANNAE DECIDE IF TERMINATION SHOULD BE AT 24 WEEKS OR 22 WEEKS...
OFFICE OF A. DARLING
OFFICE OF H. BLEARS
SYBIL'S CAT FLAP
AYE, I CAN WELL KEN THAT ABORTION LIMITS ARE A VERRA THORNY ISSUE...
PUFF
WHO SAID ANYTHIN' ABOOT ABORTION LIMITS?
JINGS, CRIVVENS AND HELP MA' BROON!
DAILY JOCK
POLL GLOOM THE NOO
HENRY DAVIES
SKID!
JOCKSHIRE POST
VOTERS GI GORDON LOADS O' LALDY

Fountain and Jamieson

MOTT THE CLINTSTONES - THE PREHISTORIC FIRST FAMILY


I am winning! I am winning!
But honey, why do you think you are winning?
Because I'm so truthful!
I'm not losing! You're all guilty of Misogyny.
Miss Ogyny? Not me! I never touched her...
Miss Arkansas, possibly...
I'm going to keep going until the end...
...of 2012 or maybe 2016!
It's not over until the fat lady dies!
YABADABADOHNO!!

Celeb

LIGGER

HI THERE. SO WHAT CAN I GET YOU TODAY?
A CAPPUCCINO FOR ME PLEASE, MATE.
COFFEE
ANYTHING ELSE?
AND A LATTE FOR MY WIFE..
TALL AND SKINNY?
YEAH TALL AND SKINNY.
OF COURSE SHE'S TALL AND SKINNY. SHE'S A MODEL FOR GOD'S SAKE..

HOPE FADES FOR MAN TRAPPED UNDER LANDSLIDE

by Our Disaster Staff **Candida Crewe and Nan Twitch**

RESCUE TEAMS were preparing to give up any hope of rescuing the man caught beneath a huge landslide that registered 17% on the Swingometer.

Said one charity worker, "We were hoping for some sign of life but I think it is time we called it a day and admitted that Gordon is beyond any help."

● Full story with distressing pics **2-94**.

Old songs revisited

Oh Mr. Porter
What shall I do?
I wanted to stay in
Downing Street
But they put me
out at Crewe.

THAT CREWE AND NANTWICH RESULT IN FULL

Tamsin Dunbadly (Labour): 3;
Edward Tophat: 278,973;
Libby Dem 2;
Others: -5. *(Toff Gain)*

BIG SWING TO LABOUR AS TOFF NOT ELECTED

by Our Political Staff **A. Prentice**

GORDON BROWN was today delighted when the Toff candidate Raef Bjayou was soundly defeated in the contest to become the new apprentice to Sir Alan Sugar in the vital BBC election.

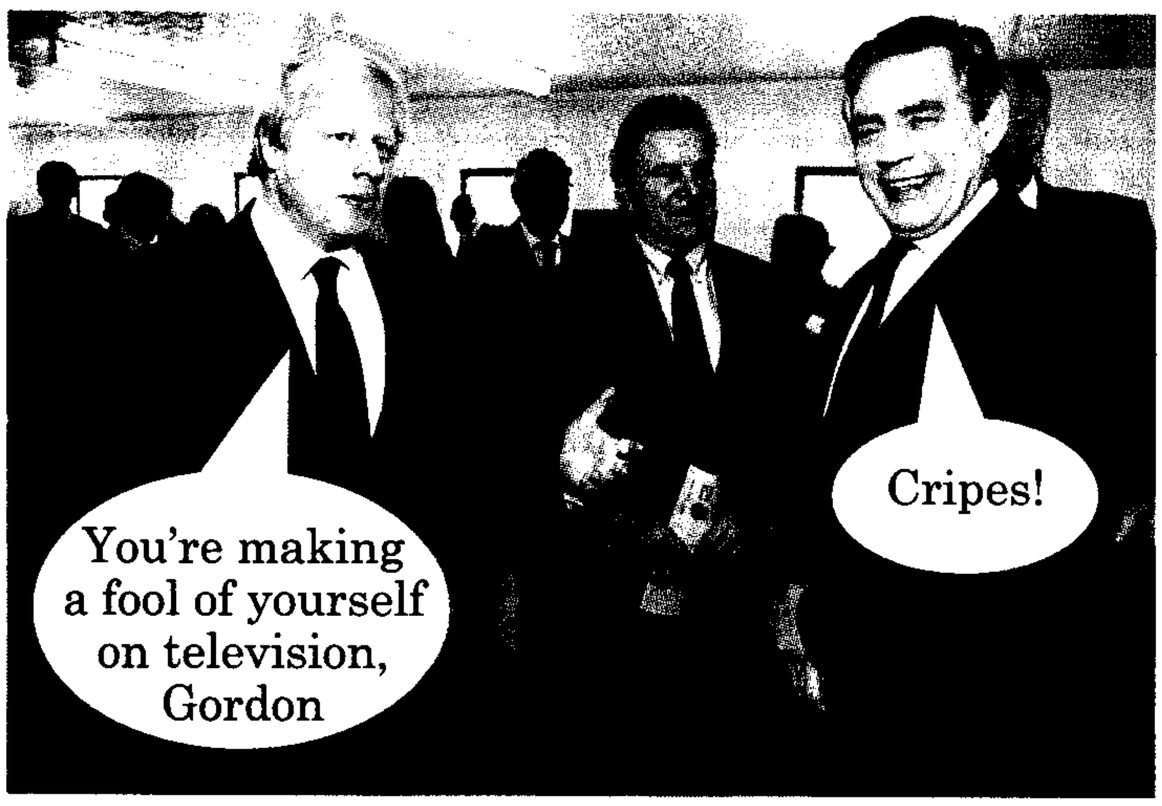
"You're fired," said Sir Alan, consigning Raef, the smooth-talking public schoolboy, to runner-up status – and the Prime Minister was delighted.

"This proves that the public have had enough of all these Camerons and Osbornes and Boris Johnsons," said Mr Brown.

"From now on, you're going to see ordinary working people winning all the major competitions, including the next election."

Mr Brown was then led away by a number of spin doctors in white coats.

SEA CHANGE IN BRITISH POLITICS



HOW TO LOSE VOTES AND ALIENATE PEOPLE 12A

NEW MOVIE OUT NOW!

starring
Gordy Brown
as
Toby Young

★★★★ *"Full of hilarious gaffes"* – Daily Mail
★★★★ *"Let's all vote Conservative"* – Crewe & Nantwich Courier

NEW HYBRID POLITICAL ANIMAL

DAILY MAIL EXCLUSIVE

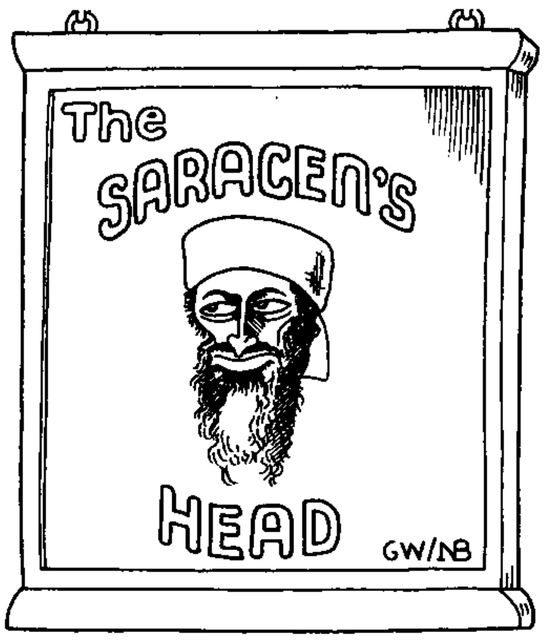
LAWS THAT ALLOW LIVING ABORTED FOETUSES TO BE MADE INTO HYBRID HALF-MAN-HALF-RAT MONSTERS AND INJECTED INTO GM PLANTS AND GIVEN TO CHILDLESS LESBIANS COULD CAUSE HOUSE PRICE CRASH

by Our Entire Staff

THERE was outrage yesterday, as laws that allow living aborted foetuses to be made into half-man-half-rat monsters and injected into GM plants and given to childless lesbians could possibly cause a house price crash.

It was obvious that the freaks of nature created by this insanity wouldn't need houses and would probably live in ponds, causing a huge drop in demand in the *(cont. p. 94)*

MODERN INN SIGNS



A Johannesburg Cabbie writes

EVERY week a well-known taxi driver is invited to comment on an issue of topical importance.

This week: **Mbeki M'chete** on the problems created for South Africa by uncontrolled immigration from neighbouring countries (i.e. Zimbabwe).

Blimey, guv, those black Zimbabweans coming over here, taking our jobs and jumping the housing queue – where's it going to end? Some of them have even got a stand-pipe at the end of the street. No wonder people don't like 'em! Who asked them to come over here? You know what I'd do with them? I'd string a tyre round their neck and set fire to it. It's the only language they understand. I had that Winnie Mandela in the back of the cab once. Very clever woman!

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Red Leader Alex Ferguson			Red Leader Gordon Brown
Cantankerous old Scot			Cantankerous old Scot
Rules with a rod of iron			Rules with a rod of iron
Prickly relationship with the media			Prickly relationship with the media
Favours the long ball game			Favours the Ed Balls game
Led his team to triumph in Europe			Led his team to disaster everywhere

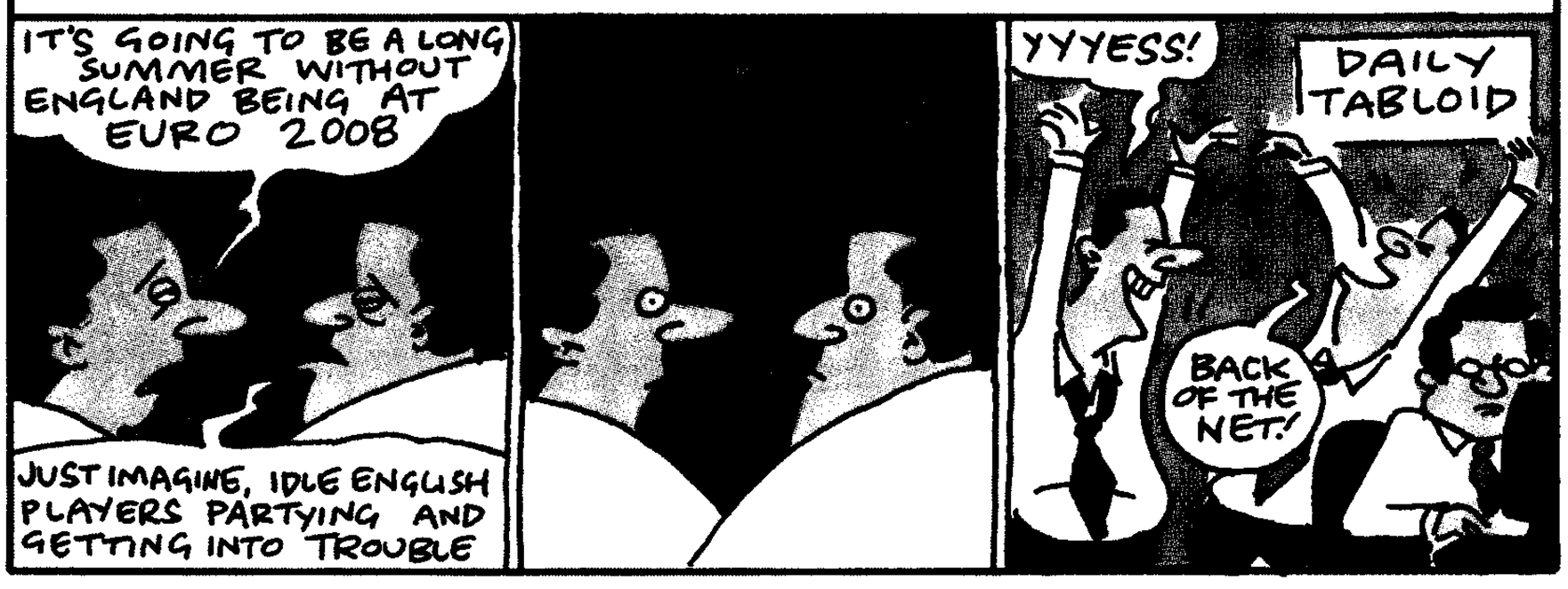
CHELSEA FC

2009

(prop. R. Abramovich)

Full line-up

the PREMIERSH*TS


IT'S GOING TO BE A LONG SUMMER WITHOUT ENGLAND BEING AT EURO 2008
JUST IMAGINE, IDLE ENGLISH PLAYERS PARTYING AND GETTING INTO TROUBLE
YYYESS!
DAILY TABLOID
BACK OF THE NET!
PAUL WOOLEY

POETRY CORNER

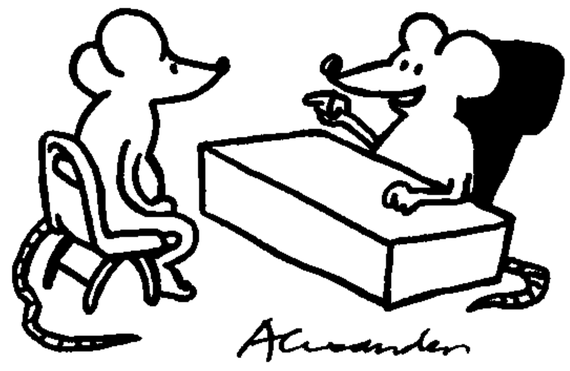
In memoriam Senator Edward Kennedy, iconic US politician

So. Farewell then
Ted Kennedy,
Brother of former President
J.F. Kennedy.

OK, so you are not dead yet,
But we will
Cross that bridge
When we come to it.

E.J. Chappathribbick (17½)

● Can you remember where you were when you first heard the news that Kennedy might be dead in a year's time? If so, we'd like to hear from you. Email us on deadkennedy@livinghistory.co.uk



"In this department we work hard and, if the cat's away, we play hard"

Radio Three

Live from the Met

Berlusconi's 'The Robber Baron and the Gypsies'

Having returned from exile to his throne in Italy, Silvio, the robber baron, finds an encampment of gypsies outside his palazzo.

The gypsies dance and sing, *"Grazie, grazie a Brussels"*, a chorus of praise to the EU for allowing them to come from their homes in faraway Romania to earn their livings as window cleaners, olive pickers and workers in the crime and sex industries.

The baron is enraged and sings the famous aria, *"Sono sono ladrone"* ("I do the robbing around here"). He incites the townsfolk, with the support of the carabinieri, to attack the gypsy camp and burn it to the ground.

As they do so, they sing the joyful closing chorus, *"Arrivederci Roma"* ("Immigrants go home").

New BBC Thatcher Play Reveals Shocking Affair

by Our Media Staff **Phil Airtime**

A NEW BBC drama about the early life of Margaret Thatcher contains the explosive revelation that the former Prime Minister had a secret romance with a famous political rival.

Hampstead Heath

In the new film, the young Margaret is shown in a passionate relationship with dashing young politician Jeremy Thorpe.

Thorpe, the leader of the Liberal Party, is depicted as a notorious ladies man who makes a beeline for the glamorous Tory sex kitten. Sizzling dialogue reveals the simmering passion between the two would-be lovebirds, including the following red-hot exchange at a fringe meeting:

Thatcher: I'm looking for a seat.

Thorpe: Aren't we all, ducky?

Thatcher: I'm happy to start at the bottom.

Thorpe: Me too, sweetie! Now, if you'll excuse me, I must talk to Edward Heath.

Heath: Hello Jeremy.

Thorpe: Hello Sailor!

Says BBC Head of Rubbish, Ben Matt: "This is an extremely well researched docudrama of the highest quality and shows Mrs Thatcher's political career in an important new light."

Said the Deputy Head of Rubbish, Matt Ben: "It is commom knowledge that Mrs Thatcher was Prime Minister of Great Britain. What is not so well known is that her lovers included Quentin Crisp, Liberace, and the young Peter Mandelson."

Indiana Jones And The Crystal Skull Reviews The First Review!

by Phil Space

WE'VE waited almost twenty years, but finally the long wait is over. Yes, every newspaper is full of reviews of "Indiana Jones and the Crystal Skull".

But has the wait been worth it? Well, yes and no. Sure, the massed ranks of Britain's films critics do have a few more grey hairs since the last time they reviewed an "Indiana Jones" film, but clearly they've lost none of their vim and vigour, as they set out on another quest for bad puns and whips ("cracking stuff", lads!!) and rip-roaring, all-action, heart-stopping clichés, to sum up the movie.

Sure, some parts of the reviews don't make much sense, and there's far too much padding in the mid section of most of them, but that's to be expected from reviewers of a certain age!

But the big question is, will these reviews still have readers flocking to their newsagents to buy the paper as they did back in 1989, when in 2008 with just one click of your mouse you can see thousands of reviews *(You're fired. Ed.)*

CANNES

WINNER OF THE PALME B'OR
"Worse Than Ever" by Woogy Pargs

THE FILM-MAKER's film-maker has created another extraordinary masterpiece in which lead character Boogy Nargs, a film-maker who has run out of ideas, runs out of ideas.

It's classic Pargs. Watch out for the scene in which the audience groan and leave the cinema in droves. Starring a number of young actors and actresses who no-one has told that Woogy has lost it.

RUNNER UP
"Even Worse Than The Last One" by Woogy Pargs

WOOGY'S very latest oeuvre takes us on a journey through *(cont. p. 94)*

GLENDA SLAGG
MOSCOW'S RED-HOT SQUARE!!

■ I DON'T care two hoots about football, but the sight of Chelsea's John Terry a-weepin' and a-wailin' as his penalty sizzled past the post brought a lump to my throat!!?! His dream and the dreams of a million others were washed away by the cruel Kremlin rain!?!! And Jinxed John has to live with this moment for the rest of his life!!?! There's only one way out – shoot yourself, John!?! Only you'd probably miss!?!! (Geddit?!)

■ JOHN TERRY – what a loser!?! Grow up, you big cry-baby – it's only a game, for Gawd's sake!?! And they don't pay you £35,000 a minute to kick a penalty so wide it went halfway to St Petersburg!?!! So what if your dream and the dreams of a million others were washed away in the cruel Kremlin rain!?! So what if you can't live with the shame!?! Shooting yourself is never the answer!?! It won't bring the Cup back to Stamford Bridge!?! So dry up Mr John Teary (geddit?!) and put in a bit of practice taking shots from the spot in future!?!??

■ SHAME ON you Alison Pearson, the *Daily Mail*'s so-called answer to yours truly!?! Fancy calling Princess beautiful bubbly Beatrice "fat"!?!! You're one to talk, Alison darling – I notice they don't put a picture of *you* in a bikini at the top of the column!?!! Alison Pearson!!? Alison Pear-Shaped, more like!!? No offence dearie but here's a fashion tip from Auntie Glenda – buy yourself a sarong and put it over your head!?!!

■ HATS OFF to Alison Pearson, my courageous colleague who's not afraid to say Princess Beatrice is a big fat lump – just like her mum!?! Good on you, Alison!?! It takes guts to point out someone else's guts (Geddit?) – and you've got plenty of them, haven't you Alison!?!! No offence fatty!?!!

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Bonk Holiday Bombshells!?!

● **The Dalai Lama.** With his sexy sandals and saffron robes, I say "Om round to my place, Big Boy, for a Tibet of the other!?!"

● **Sir Alan Sugar.** You're good at giving people the sack – are you any good in it?!?

● **Harrison Ford.** Indiana Jones?! IndiOldPeople'sHome more like!!?! Never mind – that's how I like 'em!?!!

Byeee-Election!

Nursery Times
DUCHESS GOES TO HULL

by Our Nutritional Staff **Big Miss Muffet**

THE Duchess of Pot today visited the Kettle family in Hull to give them a lecture on being black. "You Kettles are pretty dysfunctional," she said. "You have really got to sort yourselves out and stop being so black. You should try living like I do," she continued. "We Pots are jolly shiny although we feel your pain obviously and want to help you out."

On other pages

● *Gingerbread House loses hundreds and thousands* **2**

● *Humpty Dumpty argues for hybrid embryo research* **3**

● *"Who's been drinking my Vodka?" Daddy Bear in ladette backlash* **4**

WORLD EXCLUSIVE WEDDING OF THE CENTURY

In collaboration with *Hellohaveyoucomefar* magazine, *Private Eye* presents a unique guide to the Royal Family of tomorrow that is taking Britain into the 21st century.

1 Lady Rhiannon Starborgling, 23, second-cousin twice removed of Lord Bluewater, Keeper of the Royal Toastrack to Her Majesty the Queen.

2 Reg Kwikfit, 54, step-uncle to the bride Autumn O'Beal, proprietor of the Moosejaw Exhaust Center in Edmonton, Canada.

3 Rupert Ricketson-Smythe, 24, brother of the best man Pongo Ricketson-Smythe – both were at Eton with David Cameron and Boris Johnson. Rupert had to hire his wedding suit from Schilling and Lom, Gent's Outfitters of Slough, having mislaid his own during stag night at Slapper's night club organised by the groom's brother-in-law Lord Harry Voletrouser (see 16).

4 Mrs Mabel Leaf, 73, (half-sister of bride Autumn Leaf), formerly married to Reg Kwikfit's brother Bruce T. Leaf, a radio presenter on the popular "Good Morning, Ontario" drivetime show.

5 Princess Euphorbia, 19, grand-daughter of Her Majesty The Queen through her father the Duke of Gwent. Currently studying at the London School of Reflexology.

6 Miss Sally Middleclass, 21, currently in on-off meaningful relationship with His Royal Highness Prince Hooray which may lead to future "supportive parenthood" role in royal family.

7 Gilbert Dressage, 53, fellow equestrian friend of the Princess Royal, who shared bronze medal at the Oslo Olympics in 1981 on the legendary Desert Storm.

8 Obadiah Omo, 32, the first Polynesian islander to join the Royal Family through his sister's marriage to the Hon. Frederick Marshmallow who, as the great-great-nephew of the late Lord Mountbatten, is 78th in line. *(That's enough Royals. Ed.)*

Order Of Service

Conducted by the Right Rev. Sandra Dross, Editor-in-Chief of Hello! Magazine

Introduction

Dross *(for it is she)*: Hello!
Congregation: ¡Hola!
Dross: Let us pay.
Bride & Groom: Thank you very much.

The Marriage

Dross: Do you, Peter Philboots, and you, Autumn Kello!, take this cheque to have and to hold, for richer and even richer, until you both shall divorce and then we'll cover that as well?
Bride & Groom: I do.
Dross: I now pronounce you £500,000 better off.

Reading

There shall then follow a reading from *"The Profit"* by Khalil Gibran.

Hymn

The congregation shall then join in the hymn *"Now bank we all our stash"* or it may be *"Love of money divine, all loves excelling"*.

The Signing Of The Contract

Here the bride and groom will sign an exclusive deal with Hello! magazine, in which they will promise to forsake all other publications and give the pictures only to their lawful partner, ie Hello!.

Dismissal

The Queen's objections will be dismissed by the groom.

Groom: Shut up, granny. We're broke.
Congregation: Yah, shut up, misery guts!!!

Procession

The laughing couple will then proceed to the bank. It may be HSBC Windsor High Street (M. Faversham, Assistant Manager) or TSB Slough (G. Popplewell, Chief Cashier).

Organ Voluntary

(followed by the Photo Involuntary)

"My Sweet Loot" by George Harrison, played by organist R.R. Ingrams.

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

IVF Ruling: 'Fathers Not Needed'

Wen u see the Glasgo Rangers yob's recking Manchister it makes u think - wat r men 4? there more troubble than there werth! "BUT" 2 B fare a lot of them had baner's and flag's supportin the IVF so at least they ad-mit it – ***Queen_of_Herts***

Cannabis Reclassified As 'Class B' Drug

Slipping standards and inflated grades. Now the kids get a 'B' in drugs, where previously they would only have got a 'C'. – ***Cyril_the_cynic***

Ban For Speed Prank Cop

I am full of admiration for the police officer who gave the "thumbs-up" to speed cameras – the "incriminating" photograph has pride of place on the mantelpiece in my drawing room. Driving "hands-free" at speed requires no little bravery, and his smiling face is the personification of grace under pressure. How refreshing, too, that he gave the cheery thumbs-up, and not the aggressive American "finger" which seems to have overrun our shores. (I feel a pamphlet coming on!) I for one will be following his example with a good old English two-finger salute (the other sort: V for victory!) – ***Edwin***

Edwin - u got a spescial room were u keep ur draw? I keep mine in me pocket 4 wen I need a smoke in the street – ***Zaks_bak***

School Students To Be Screened For Gang Membership

Genius – put them on TV and make them celebrity's!! – ***Prima Donut***

CPS Files Chaos

no sh!t shylock!! my mate met a man who works in the cps and he sees file's every day.... ilegel - giv him a sum money...forein rapist - give him a house...old dear fergot to buy a tv lisense - bang her up for ten yrs... English man put a flag on his house - throw away the key...I could go on. As the sayin go's - you could'nt make it up! – ***No_Justice_UK***

Stressed Brown's Inky Fingers And Bitten Nails

About time Bottl-er brown puld his fing-er out! wtf?! its all choo-ed and staned – eeew!!! put it back again! – ***Minny_the_minx***

Bad temperd, unhapy bein priminister, only sleeps 3 hours a night. If he slepped more and worked less he wuld infect less damage on are once great countrey – ***Born_2_booze***

only has 1 eye so may-be needs half as much sleep? – ***Janice***

No wonder we get 1 eye-ed justice lol!– ***No_Justice_UK***

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

0820 hrs PC Shadwell radios in for emergency help following a serious apple-core incident which he had observed while sitting in his vehicle eating his breakfast outside the Dunkin Donuts retail outlet at the junction of Pricerite Road and Morrison's Crescent.

Motorist was spotted ejecting a half-eaten apple core from the window of his Peugeot 304 into a privet hedge, in contravention of Section 213(b) of the Biodegradable Fruit Matter (Prevention Of Discarding) Order 2005.

Two support cars were despatched to effect the arrest of the suspect, Mr Hugo Wilby, 67, the headmaster of Neasden's Lord Levy Beacon Academy, who was later charged with 13 offences, including resisting arrest and driving a motor vehicle while talking to a handheld piece of fruit. Bail was refused.

0900 hrs All officers were summoned to a staff association meeting to discuss the right to take industrial action in pursuit of our 104 percent wage claim, backdated to 1954. Elevenses and lunch were provided. Motion supporting strike was unanimously carried.

1214 hrs Emergency call from the N. Ron Hubbard Memorial Hall to say an unauthorised protest was taking place outside the premises, threatening a major breach of the peace. The entire force was deployed to the address in question, with which we were familiar, having enjoyed the hospitality of the Church's Chief Thetan, Mr Gilbert Rowbotham, only the previous evening. The Chief Thetan, moreover, had flown in from Mars especially for the occasion. We would like to record our thanks for an excellent dinner and some fine Californian wine (Premier Tom Cruise), rounded off with a very enjoyable showing of Mr Travolta's latest film, Battlefield Earth III.

On arrival at the Hubbard Tabernacle, officers discovered a mass demonstration involving a 12-year-old boy, Wayne Dimple, carrying an inflammatory banner reading "Down With Scientology". The boy, who cannot be named for legal reasons, was arrested under the Incitement To Religious Hatred Act 2004.

Whilst travelling to the hospital with the now-injured suspect, the vehicle driven by PC Morden was involved in a 100mph collision with a young female pedestrian, who suffered an immediate terminal experience.

When members of her family suggested that PC Morden might in some way have been responsible for the young person's demise, it was necessary to restrain them by 1000-volt Taser from expressing totally uncalled-for and abusive comments designed to lower the police service in the esteem of the law-abiding community. Unfortunately, two of the subdue-ees failed to recover.

1422 hrs On return to the station, the answerphone reported a number of messages from members of the public calling for assistance on the grounds that they were being burgled, stabbed, raped or murdered. We were not able to respond to those calls, owing to all officers having to report to Neasden Crown Court to give evidence in the case of Channel Four versus the Greater Neasden Police Service.

The case concerned a television documentary film called "Preachers Of Hate", shot inside the Neasden Central Jihadi Mosque and Madrassa complex, formerly the Neasden Odeon. The officers explained to the court how the film had shown Imam Talebani al-Q'aeda preaching a sermon on why all Jews, women, poofs and other infidels should be stoned to death. The officers had immediately arrested the film makers for inciting Islamophobic hatred.

NOTICE: There will be no change to our Bank Holiday service to the public, when the station will be operating as normal – i.e. it will be closed. Any members of the public in need of emergency assistance may contact our counselling service, which has been outsourced to Ganesh Call Centre Solutions in Bangalore on 0877 614 23781.

DALAI FLIES IN

by Our Religious Staff **Archbishop Rowan Pelling**

THE PRIME MINISTER Gordon Brown today had a "long and friendly" private meeting with one of the world's most respected spiritual leaders, the Dalai Telegraph.

Followers of the Dalai believe that he is a unique being, a two-in-one avatar that is both divine and human, taking the outward form of two identical brothers, Yin and Yang Barclay.

The two live in a fortified monastery on the remote island kingdom of Brilleau, where they spend their days counting all the money they are losing, thanks to their insane efforts to run a newspaper.

The prime minister bowed low before the Dalai, asking for spiritual guidance and editorial support.

"Please," he told them, "help me. I am desperate because no one believes in me any longer.

"I have been deserted by the Dalai Mail, and even the Sun God Murdoch has gone over to the other side."

But the Dalai Telegraph only smiled enigmatically, and later issued a statement through their acolyte Matthew D'Ancona, saying "Would you like to buy a spectator hat? It's only £17.99."

Advertisement

FROM THE KITCHEN
OF LADY HEATHER MILLS
McCARTNEY *A NEW RANGE*
OF VEGETARIAN SPECIALS!

The Lady Mucca Veggie Menu

includes

- **Quarter-pound beefburger**
- **Giant Cumberland sausage**
- **Steak and Kidney pudding**
- **Scotch Egg**

"They're veggie-veggie tasty" says TV's Heather McDonalds, "I would cook them for Sir Paul every night if I was still married to him, which I'm not, the bastard."

All proceeds go to Heather's Save The Animals Fund.

WARNING. Some of these dishes may contain vegetable by-products

DIARY

MELVYN MEETS GORE

GORE VIDAL: You know, of course, that marvellous story about Harold Macmillan?

MELVYN: I'm not sure....

GORE: Well, Harold Macmillan, who, as you, as a fellow novelist, know so well, Melvyn, was the then President of England – and a very successful one too, in his modest moustachioed way – was once sitting next to Madame de Gaulle at in America we insist upon calling a "dinner party", stop me if you've heard this...

MELVYN: Oh, yes, I think I may have heard this one before –

GORE: – and Macmillan turned to Madame de Gaulle and said something frightfully amusing to her, though exactly what history regrettably does not record.

MELVYN: HA HA HA HA! Marvellous! Wonderful! That's a great story!

* * *

MELVYN: Gore Vidal has long been a master story-teller. He is best known as an intellectual and a polymath, an essayist, novelist and historian. He was born a baby, but soon grew up to be a young boy and some years later a youth. Now an old man, he looks back on life first as a young man, and, for many years, as a middle aged man.

GORE: As you may discover, Melvyn, when you get to be as old as I am, that the nation we laughingly call The United States of America is in reality no such thing at all. It is a little known fact – and America, as we both know, is, above all else, the land of little known facts, many of them deeply depressing – that the current President of the Disunited States – (!) – is a full Colonel in the Ku Klux Klan, a convicted drug-trafficker and, furthermore – or morefurther, as the great Gibbon might have put it – he is a secret transvestite, parading in his wife Barbara's frocks from eight o'clock to ten o'clock every morning. As my great uncle Teddy Roosevelt used to say, it makes you think.

* * *

MELVYN: Gore Vidal has long been a distinguished thinker. His volumes of distinguished thoughts are themselves thought by a great many distinguished thinkers to be a thoughtful way of thinking about great thoughts. Now aged 82, he looks back on a life spent looking back.

Gore, what drove you to think?

GORE: As a young – and, it behoves me to add, needlessly beautiful – young man, I thought it was about time people heard the truth. The American peoples had heretofore evinced little interest in the truth; indeed, they despised it to the very core of their beings. The whole American society, if one may honour it with so felicitous a term, is dedicated to the wholesale pursuit of the lie. Why else would their then President have lent his authority to that greatest of all hoaxes, the simulation, within the artificial confines of a Hollywood studio, of a man – two men, indeed, though neither my type, might I add – landing upon the moon, that woebegone orb? So I decided to draw their albeit fleeting attention to the peculiar land they had chosen so incuriously to inhabit. As I once told the perky dauber Picasso and the excessively bejewelled Queen Mother over dinner with my poor dear cousin Winston Churchill, I hate lying. Of course, the American Establishment was furious at me for letting the feline animal out of the sack-like container, and all hell, as the second-rate poet Milton once put it, broke loose.

MELVYN: You were yourself born into the American Establishment?

GORE: Quite so, quite so. My great-great-grandfather, one of the greatest Gores of all time, built the White House as his summer cottage, but found it frankly too poky and passed it on to the little man he currently chose to employ as the President. Then his son in a moment of madness founded something called Washington DC, not, I fear, a course of action to be recommended to others, but the poor man needed somewhere to store all those thousands of senators and congressmen who were so eager to take his shilling.

MELVYN: Marvellous! Let's move forward to the 1960s now, and your seventeenth –

GORE: – Eighteenth –

MELVYN: Your eighteenth novel, a seven-hundred-page portrait of Washington in the early 19th century, shocked America.

GORE: The American peoples refused to buy it, on direct orders, I was later to learn, from the late and oh-so-very-unlamented Vice President Spiro Agnew, the very same man, I might add, who, some time later, so successfully concealed the entrapment of the Loch Ness Monster by the CIA from the notably unwary eyes of the bekilted population of the Scottish lowlands.

* * *

MELVYN: Gore, you are so wise and so clever that people like me used to call you the President-in-Exile...

GORE: Too kind, Melvyn, too kind: but true as well, of course. As a fellow novelist, Melvyn, you know only too well that had the American people not been so very simple and uneducated and our media not so wholly corrupt, then I would have been the natural choice for the White House. But that choice was denied the American people, in all their bovine idiocy. As it was, the CIA got to them first, so we were forced to make do with the alloted choice of agents, among them the slippery pill-popper my good friend Jack Kennedy, the lumpen and overly priapic LBJ, the upsettingly sweaty Richard M. Nixon, poor earnest little Jimmy Carter... the list of unmentionables goes on and on. Small wonder that we have now got ourselves into a situation in Iraq where the car-manufacturers, under the excessively-hirsute and wholly secret leadership of our dear friend Mr Osama bin Laden – who is, in case you don't realise, the Chairman of our dear old Ford Motor Company – are deliberately stirring up strife so as to sell their ruinously expensive and far-from-efficient vehicles to the American military.

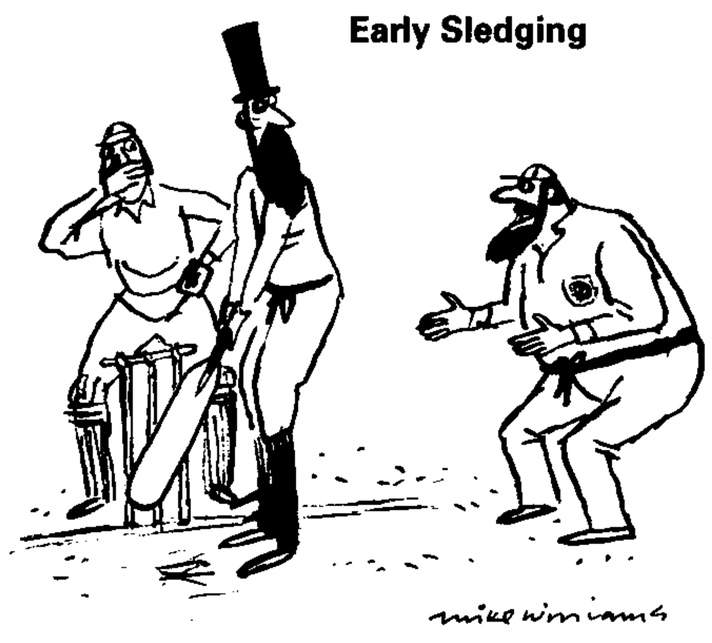
MELVYN: Without doubt, many would regard that as one of the most incisive analyses of American foreign policy of the past fifty years...

GORE: And, as my old friend Albert Einstein used to say, they would not be wrong, dear boy, they would not be wrong...

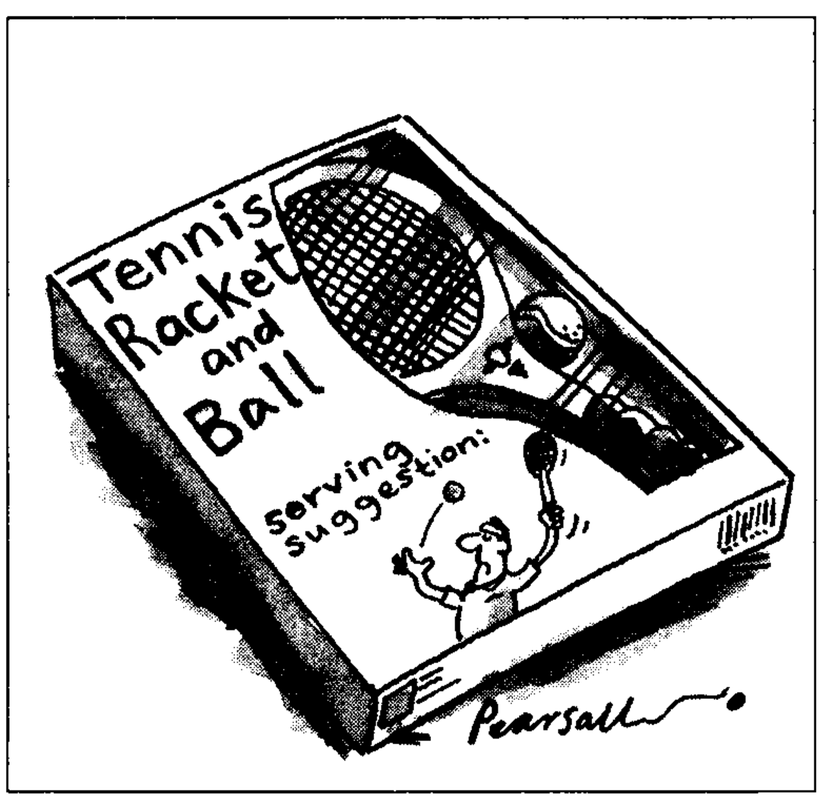
As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Early Sledging



"I'll warrant that your mother's sister's cousin is not a particularly nice sort of a person..."



"Do you ever get the feeling that everyone else is having more sex than you are?"

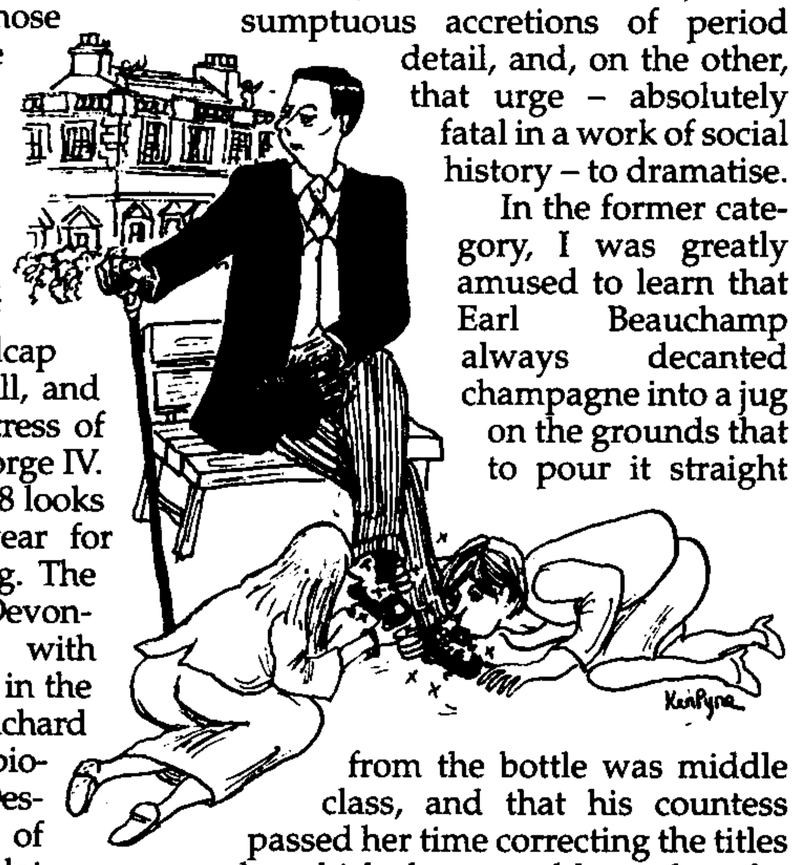
Literary Review

With snobs on

The Bolter
Frances Osborne
(Virago, £18.99)

Madresfield: The Real Brideshead
Jane Mulvagh
(Doubleday, £20)

WHAT might be called the toff hagiography strain in English letters has well-nigh ineradicable roots. There is no getting away from this. No matter how strong the public predisposition for middle-class meritocrats, whose earthly rewards are gained by hard work and persistence, there always comes a moment when the books pages are suddenly aflame with breathless accounts of Binkie Beausoleil, madcap Marchioness of Cornball, and her career as First Mistress of the Powdercloset to George IV.



For some reason 2008 looks set to be a vintage year for upper-class gadabouting. The Dowager Duchess of Devonshire's correspondence with Patrick Leigh-Fermor is in the press, together with Richard Davenport-Hines's biography of Lady Desborough. The re-make of *Brideshead Revisited*, its plot reliably manipulated by screenwriter Andrew Davies to crank up the bonk factor, is in the can. And here, as an entrée to this banquet of ghastly good taste, come Jane Mulvagh's study of Madresfield, *Brideshead*'s inspiration, and Mrs George Osborne's take on her wicked great-grandma, Idina Sackville.

It takes only a moment or two's browsing among these darling items to get a whiff of that distinctive *beau monde* atmosphere, and yet the signature mark of the toff hagiography doesn't immediately declare itself.

It is not just a matter of outlandish names, whose pronunciation differs from their spelling ("De La Warr" = "Delaware"; "Lygon" = "Liggon" and so on). It is not simply an habitual meekness in the presence of lordly *éclat* that, for example, encourages Frances Osborne to caption large numbers of the photos in her picture section "courtesy of the 24th Earl of Errol". Nor is it even the pervasive scent of bygone aristocratic scandal: *Madresfield*'s dynamic being Earl Beauchamp's flight into exile after his brother-in-law threatened to expose his homosexuality; Lady Idina having exchanged the duties of child-care for a jolly time in Kenya with four further husbands and a couple of dozen toy-boys to boot.

No, what guarantees both books' absolute upper-class OK-ness is, on the one hand, their sumptuous accretions of period detail, and, on the other, that urge – absolutely fatal in a work of social history – to dramatise.

In the former category, I was greatly amused to learn that Earl Beauchamp always decanted champagne into a jug on the grounds that to pour it straight from the bottle was middle class, and that his countess passed her time correcting the titles by which she was addressed on the envelopes of the day's post before dropping them in the waste-paper basket. In the latter, I was particularly struck by an account of Idina arriving at Claridges in 1934 to meet the teenage son she had abandoned 15 years before. "Her heels clipped across the hallway… In front of her, pairs of hats bobbed past with the hiss of a whisper..." Barbara Cartland couldn't have done it better, but where does all this come from? Osborne's quoted sources are her mother and grandmother. Were they there too?

Some wider questions remain. Why are these people – Waugh's chums among the younger Lygons, Lady Idina and her dismal amours – interesting? Thackeray, famously, defined a snob as "he who meanly admires mean things". Another definition might be "the assumption of a false superiority". But sometimes this can mean presuming a superiority in someone else.

Some of the funniest moments in James Lees-Milnes' compendious diaries come when Jim exults in some aristocratic friend's good opinion of his writing. Do these titans have any particular literary expertise? No. You see, in some mysterious way the literary sensibility comes free with the ducal coronet.

Both *Madresfield* and *The Bolter* are drenched in assumptions of this kind, although in Osborne's case the fascination with all this long-dead hanky panky is tempered by the lurking awareness that she doesn't really approve of it. Unfortunately this creates problems of its own.

"Sitting here at my desk in my hillside farmhouse overlooking the vast stretch of the Cheshire Plain," her final paragraph somewhat whimsically concludes, "I can hear my two small children scampering back indoors. It is time I stopped writing and went to them." We get the point – sucks to great-grandmamma – but doesn't this rather negate the enthusiasm of the preceding 272 pages? But that's toff hagiography for you – loudly proclaiming that tins of golden syrup are injurious to the system, but continuing to pour it down your throat.

Books & Bookmen

■ THIS year's Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-fiction had an unusually strong longlist. As a result a lot of very good books were snubbed when the shortlist was produced, and plenty of authors and publishers have been left sobbing.

Among the titles that failed to make the final six – which included almost automatic selections such as Patrick French's Naipaul biography and Alex Ross's *The Rest Is Noise*, but also more surprising choices – were JG Ballard's memoirs (HarperCollins), Julian Barnes's *Nothing to be Frightened Of* (Cape), Julie Kavanagh's Nureyev biography (Fig Tree/Penguin) and a popular success long assumed to be guaranteed a shortlist spot, David Kynaston's *Austerity Britain* (Bloomsbury).

All these publishing groups have ended up with a shortlisted title, but it's not necessarily the book they thought had the best chance. Luckiest is Picador, although its Ondaatje prizewinner, Graham Robb's *The Discovery of France*, failed to graduate from long to shortlist. The life of Naipaul was not even submitted as one of its entries, but it was rescued by the judges calling it in (and now it's the bookies' favourite).

■ FRUSTRATION and alarm are barely concealed at Random House, where bosses rely on getting an annual Ruth Rendell mystery (either a Reg Wexford or a standalone) as part of their budget calculations.

As the autumn catalogues reveal, there'll be no Rendell this year – but, even more gallingly, she does have a Barbara Vine novel coming out – and they're published by Penguin.

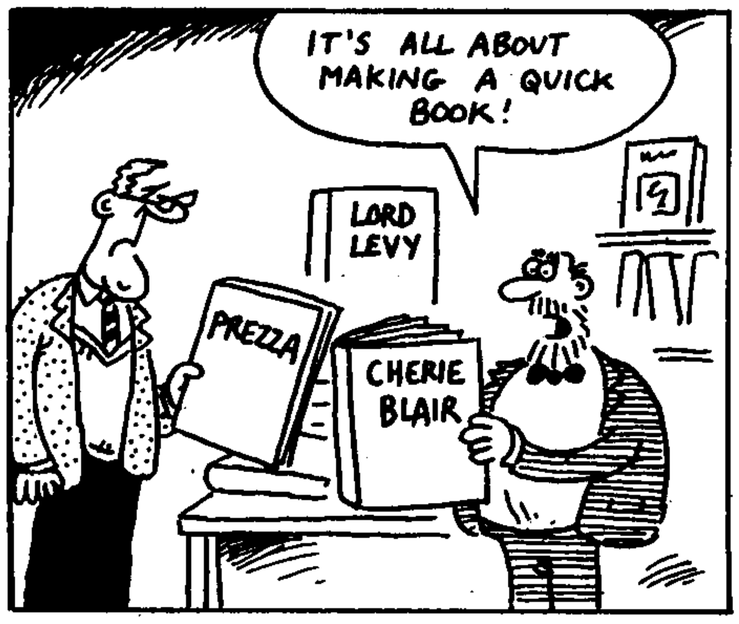
It seems she feels publishing Rendell and Vine books a few months apart would invite criticism of Joyce Carol Oates-like over-production; though there are suspicions that other factors could be involved. Possibly she is reluctant to go head-to-head with her friend PD James, who does have an autumn whodunnit scheduled. As the "Blue Baroness", James is far less prolific than the "Red Baroness", Rendell, and they're normally able to avoid such clashes. Then there has been the huge fuss Random House made of its new, $1m-per-novel crime signing James Patterson. It's unlikely Rendell is a fan of his oeuvre.

■ SO Gail Rebuck will not be departing our shores to head Random House Inc after all, with the top job in New York going instead to industrial engineer Markus Dohle.

La Rebuck will, however, be able to console herself with a new view from her office in London, where instructions have just gone out that all walls bar those surrounding her own desk are to be pulled down and the building to be rendered open-plan, which at least means staff will be able to spot which of their colleagues is the latest to be ordered to clear their desks in an attempt to claw back some of the £4.6m the company has paid Tony Blair for his memoirs.

And when was the last refit and redecoration of the building completed, after two years' work and great expense? Why as long ago as… 2007!

■ "I STARTED Virago to break a silence, to make women's voices heard, to tell women's stories, my



story and theirs," recalled publisher Carmen Callil in the *Guardian* recently.

"We had our standards. We had a limit known as the Whipple line, below which we would not sink. Dorothy Whipple was a popular novelist of the 1930s and 1940s whose prose and content absolutely defeated us. A considerable body of women novelists, who wrote like the very devil, bit the Virago dust when Alexandra, Lynn and I exchanged books and reports, on which I would scrawl a brief rejection: 'Below the Whipple line'."

One week later, up popped Nicola Beauman in the *Sunday Telegraph* to explain what had driven her to set up Persephone, her own company dedicated to re-publishing classics by female authors. "I realised there were still so many utterly wonderful women writers out there – like Dorothy Whipple and Marghanita Laski – who had completely disappeared," she explained.

'Bookworm'

Waterstones, Hampstead

Another re-entry

Up Till Now: The Autobiography

William Shatner (with David Fisher)

(Sidgwick & Jackson, £18.99)

F. SCOTT Fitzgerald once wrote that there are no second acts in American lives, but then he was drunk and frequently wrong and, through an accident of birth, never saw a single episode of *Star Trek*.

With intense determination, and sporting a succession of ever more terrifying wigs, William Shatner has shown that second acts are actually there for the taking, and can be followed by as many other acts as you have time to fit in. How does he do it? Why does he do it?

Shatner is 77 now, the same age as Leonard Nimoy, who effectively retired several years ago and now just lives long and prospers. But Shatner keeps going, winning Emmys and Golden Globes for his recurring role in *Boston Legal*, and now writing (or at least, dictating) this autobiography. Which, astonishingly, is only his fourth or fifth. On this account, if on no other, he appears to have been slacking.

For the *Star Trek* industry never dies. When the fifth distinct TV series, *Enterprise*, was cancelled in 2005, it ended an 18-year run of non-stop Trekkage that had made a fortune for its studio Paramount and eroded the patience of even the most fervent fans. (The pneumatic breasts of the Vulcan science officer T'Pol in the final series had been, for many, a leap too far.)

After 700 or so episodes, it seemed reasonable to assume the game was up. Bones had died in 1999, Scotty followed in 2005 and even the youthful stars of *The Next Generation* were now all in their 40s and 50s, dashing Commander Riker, in particular, having consumed a large proportion of the pies.

A useful measure of the health of the franchise, though, is its publishing arm. Despite the absence of new programming, new *Star Trek* novels have continued to appear regularly. Co-author of ten of them, in fact, is one William Shatner, credited in huge letters on their covers while his collaborators, the shadowy Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens, are in about 3pt type underneath. So it shouldn't have come as any surprise when a brand new feature film, simply titled *Star Trek*, was announced last year. It's out in November, but chances are that if you have read this far, you already know that.

Shatner isn't in the new film – Nimoy is, in a cameo – but he is busy enough with *Boston Legal* and about 28 parallel careers, all of which he boasts about in this shamelessly egocentric volume. *Up Till Now* follows *Star Trek Memories* (1993), *Star Trek Movie Memories* (1994) and the slightly more mellow *Get A Life* (1999), in which Shatner showed signs of finally coming to terms with the fact that he is Captain Kirk and no one gives a monkey's about T J Hooker.

It's a familiar complaint from actors who become typecast in a particular role, and particularly familiar from actors who worked on *Star Trek*. All the regulars bar DeForest Kelley, the late Bones, have published autobiographies; Nimoy has published two, *I Am Not Spock* (1977) and *I Am Spock* (1995). As Shatner himself says: "Actors tend to be extremely focused, of necessity narcissistic and often highly competitive" – a sentence he may have written with a mirror handy. His fellow cast-members may have moaned about being typecast, but they moaned about Shatner even more. He seems to have lived to upstage, and if that involved having his shirt torn off by alien lovelies from time to time in pursuit of his Starfleet duties, that was a price he was willing to pay.

That said, *Up Till Now* is more mellow still, crammed full of anecdotes from a long and full life, and infused with a self-deprecating humour the younger Shatner would have been incapable of. He is, of course, a disgraceful old ham, utterly without shame or repentance, and constantly interrupting his stories to try and flog you some piece of tat from one of his websites. But as you come to appreciate his extraordinary chutzpah, you begin to understand why he was so good as Captain Kirk. Of several memoirs recently published by corpulent old men with absurd hairstyles, this is the only one anyone need read.

Frank Lampard, his final mission accomplished, relinquishes himself to some divine power. He falls to his knees, eyes closed as if in prayer, in his left hand the black armband he was wearing as a tribute to his dead mother. His physical strength has been surrendered to a spiritual fate.

It is a pair of teammates who have to support him. They are the believers who have benefited from their friend's act of faith. They cradle him in their arms, forming the classic pyramidal composition of a 15th-century masterpiece. The lines created by their locked gazes, the zigzagging angles of their interlacing limbs, form dramatic patterns across the surface plane of the picture. This gives the image visual force. It will plant this photograph as securely in the imagination of the football lover as Michelangelo fixed him images of sacrifice in the minds of religious believers.

RACHEL CAMPBELL-JOHNSON, ***The Times***

Matt Dunham's photo (Sport, May 1) of Didier Drogba and Ricardo Carvalho tenderly cradling Frank Lampard's pale and exhausted body was a truly remarkable piece of sports photography. I'm sure I was not only one to see echoes of Michelangelo's Pietà in this image.

ALAN GAVURIN, letter to *Guardian*

Weir played with an injury. He was magnificent. He chose the crucible of the Renaissance to give further evidence of his personal rebirth.

HUGH MACDONALD on Rangers' UEFA Cup victory over Fiorentina, ***Glasgow Herald***

People and places are sometimes made for each other and Sir Alex Ferguson and Moscow certainly appear a perfect fit. It is surely entirely appropriate that Manchester United's manager will endeavour to win his second Champions League trophy in the Russian capital because this is a city and a country still touched by one of the architects of the 1917 revolution, Leon Trotsky.

Rather like life at Old Trafford under Ferguson since the European Cup was last lifted in 1999, Trotskyism is all about permanent revolution

LOUISE TAYLOR, ***Guardian***

It goes back to trench warfare during the first world war. The people who dealt with it best were the ones who maintained their personal appearance. They found that, too, on polar expeditions. The guys who started turning into cavemen were the first ones to go. It's all about maintaining your personal style and your grooming – they become increasingly important to your own sense of order and well-being during difficult times.

SIMON DOONEY, Creative Director of Barneys, on 'What to wear during a recession', ***Financial Times***

I use traditional materials to stuff the furniture, such as coir and animal hair, and hand lash in all the springs. Sometimes I hide poetry and handwritten stories in different parts of them... My first piece – a chair that I had thrown off a cliff and then rebuilt – sold for £5,000 in 2006. I've also sold the 'Slag suite' – a sofa bed and two chairs embroidered with swear words for £18,000.

Former Thompson Twin ALANNAH CURRIE on her new career as an artist-upholster, ***Guardian Weekend***

CONTRIBUTORS : Jon Ashford-Smith (and three others), Ann Keith (and four others), C. Hollingsworth, Gerry O'Brien, Gillian Harrison, Paul Townsend.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

OLYMPIC JUNKETS

Schmooze and deliver

THE official Olympic "delivery partner" CLM, a consortium of CH2M, Laing O'Rourke and Mace, has certainly been keeping in with the Olympic Delivery Authority bosses who pay its £20m-plus a year bills.

The ODA's hospitality registers show that CLM wined and dined the ODA bosses on no fewer than 21 occasions, seven in the three months up to this March, including dinners at unspecified restaurants for ODA chief executive David Higgins and the man who signs the cheques, finance director Dennis Hone.

Then there were days out at Twickenham for the Six Nations rugby match between England and Wales for chief lawyer Celia Carlisle, property director Ralph Luck and planning director Niall McNevin.

Last year finance director Hone managed to enjoy both England's home fixtures courtesy of an Olympics supplier. He watched England v. Scotland, again courtesy of CLM, along with the ODA's head of procurement Morag Stewart. Then financial adviser Ernst & Young – also earning millions from the ODA – treated him to see the France game, which Luck and design director Alison Nimmo also attended as guests of CLM.

All part of the job? Er, not exactly. Rugby lost the vote to be included in the 2012 games some time ago. Squash and karate got the nod instead… but they don't make such a grand day out, do they?

POLICING THE POLICE

Brighton crock

THE family of a man left seriously brain-damaged after being "taken to the ground" by police officers and a nightclub bouncer are appealing for witnesses to the incident in Brighton city centre in March.

Garry Reynolds, 39 (pictured), was found in a coma in a cell at Brighton Custody Centre eight hours after he had been left there by Sussex police, who had arrested him for being drunk and assaulting an officer.

The plea for witnesses came after the family persuaded a high court judge to order the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) to wrest control from Sussex police of the full investigation into how Mr Reynolds came to be unconscious. For reasons best known to the IPCC, it had argued it only had responsibility to investigate from the moment officers arrived at the scene.

Sussex police themselves had been examining what had happened up until that moment, as well as interviewing at least one witness to events both before and after officers came into contact with Mr Reynolds. As lawyers for the family told the court, it could be in the interests of police to find some explanation for Mr Reynolds's devastating injuries – and subsequent care – which would clear them of any responsibility. And in such cases, the IPCC should simply investigate all the events or supervise an investigation carried out by another force.

Mr Reynolds had been at a party at a pub in the Kemp Town area before being picked up by a taxi driver some distance away at about 1.50am on Sunday 2 March. As Mr Reynolds was drunk and "talking gibberish" and did not seem to know where he was going, the driver decided to take him to the city centre, where he knew there would be police around.

When the cabbie asked officers for help, the police say they attempted to arrest Mr Reynolds for being drunk and disorderly but he kicked out at a policewoman. A bouncer from a nearby club joined in and Mr Reynolds was wrestled to the ground.

Mr Justice Collins said officers reported a loud "thud or crack" as if Mr Reynolds's head had hit the ground, but as there was no obvious injury they assumed it must have been something being dropped. They applied what is known as a "viper restraint", binding legs and arms together. The taxi driver, one of the witnesses questioned by police, described the arrest as "a bit heavy".

Police took Mr Reynolds to the custody centre, where he was placed in a cell at 3.15am. According to national guidelines, "drunks" should be roused every 30 minutes – but that does not appear to have happened, and the family have been told that CCTV footage from the camera in the cell corridor is missing. No concerns about his condition were logged, and it was not until 11am that an ambulance was summoned after Mr Reynolds could not be roused. He is still in hospital and will never fully recover from his injuries.

The case raised many concerns, said the judge. Had Mr Reynolds sustained the head injury in an assault? Had he had an accident, or was it possible that there "may have been excessive force used at the time of arrest which caused Mr Reynolds to hit his head"?

Some CCTV footage makes it clear there were people around at the nearby taxi rank. The family think some revellers may have filmed part of the incident on their mobile phones, and they are asking them to contact the IPCC. They are also keen to trace a woman passenger who got out of the taxi in Eastern Avenue before Mr Reynolds climbed in, and a couple who were walking nearby.

Made in China

THE London 2012 Olympics will be "a tremendous opportunity for the business community in the UK" claims CompeteFor (*sic*), the brokerage service run by the regional development agencies to encourage British companies to bid for games-related contracts.

The contracts for souvenir knick-knacks are already being dished out by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (Locog). And who will be supplying all the 2012 pin badges? Step forward Chinese company, Honav!

This is not a pin-sized contract. A recent company statement revealed that in 2007 alone Honav's sales of Beijing Olympics products reached 200m yuan (£15m), with huge sales expected in 2008. With Honav the sole licensee for 2012 badges, it will also be the only option for any Olympic partner companies using any of the protected Olympic logos on their own badges – so UK companies that already supply those corporate badges will, in fact, lose custom.

There are plenty of British companies producing enamel pin badges and similar promotional products, so how was the contract won by Honav? Could there by any chance be a clue in Honav's announcement last year that it had signed former International Olympic Committee marketing director Michael

ELDERLY CARE

Home to roost

RELATIVES of elderly residents who suffered neglect and mistreatment in Lynde House, run at the time by Chai "Diddums" Patel's Westminster "Care" Homes (*Eyes passim*), will finally have their grievances aired in public.

Six years after allegations of poor care were first levelled at staff – as well as at the "caring tycoon" himself – two senior nurses will finally face disciplinary charges brought by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

Sarah Johnson, the manager of the west London home, and Lyn Maggs, the matron, face a series of allegations relating to the care of up to 18 old people during a six-year period ending in 2002. They include failing to ensure residents were washed, fed and given fluids, failing to ensure call bells were answered, and failing to ensure that care plans were drawn up and medicines kept and administered properly.

Eye readers will recall how frail patients at the care home had been left for hours sitting in their own waste, and suffered preventable falls and unexplained bruising. Some were left unmoved for so long they developed bed sores.

Charges against four other nurses, including a local authority home inspector, were thrown out by the NMC. In 2005, a high court judge dismissed the General Medical Council case against Dr Patel (pictured), ruling that it amounted to no more than a dog's dinner of loosely drawn charges and that he was being made a scapegoat for the home's ills.

At one stage it looked as if the similar professional conduct case against the nurses was heading the same way, as their counsel, Mary O'Rourke (also Dr Patel's barrister), again argued that the charges were too loosely drawn up and the lack of detail amounted to an abuse of process because the nurses did not know exactly what is being alleged against them.

This time, however, Mr Justice Beatson dismissed Ms O'Rourke's argument. The case is expected to start next month.

FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP... FOLLOW-UP...

■ QINETIQ: The privatised defence firm faces another hurdle in its unpopular attempt to build luxury flats on former Ministry of Defence land at Eastney on the south coast (see *Eye* 1201).

It probably hoped its threat of costly legal action would pressurise Portsmouth city council into releasing a narrow strip of land, part of a site of important nature conservation (SINC) and which QinetiQ needs to widen its access road, in return for a meagre £75,000. But it reckoned without the six council cabinet members who attended an extraordinary meeting to discuss QinetiQ's threat of judicial review.

The dispute over access to the disused gunnery site was the only obstacle to QinetiQ's plans for beachfront apartments and last month the privatised former MoD research arm launched judicial review proceedings to force councillors to turn over the land. Councillors had rejected the proposal in January after environmentalists raised concerns about the threat to roosting and feeding birds at the SINC, particularly the rare Dartford Warbler. Naturists also feared being driven off the secluded beach they have used with the council's and MoD's blessing since the 1940s.

But last week, on the day before the authority had to respond to the legal threat, councillors were urged to think again to "bring an end to this costly litigation". As urged, they duly rescinded January's decision to reject recommendations to approve the road widening scheme…only to go on and promptly reject the proposals once more! No reason was given, but it seems there is concern that small print may allow QinetiQ to encroach even further into the SINC.

All this might have been avoided if in the first place the city council had not granted outline planning permission for the controversial development, on condition the access road be upgraded and widened. QinetiQ argues that it is unreasonable and unlawful for the council to impose a planning condition on a development it then effectively blocks.

If the council eventually gives in, it could face legal challenges from those who want to preserve the site from developers. There are claims that QinetiQ's flood risk surveys are out of date and that more environmental and bird surveys need to be done. M'learned friends are rubbing their hands at the prospect.

NHS PLC

HEALTHCARE IT

You only pay twice

WITH publication of the long-awaited follow-up to its 2006 whitewash of the NHS's £13bn National Programme for IT, the National Audit Office (NAO) is almost as late in its criticism of the debacle as the programme itself is in providing computer services.

The NAO's latest report does at least finally acknowledge the inordinate delays the *Eye* first demonstrated two years ago and chronicled in a special report, *System Failure* (*Eye* 1179).

Four years in, the programme is (generously) estimated to be four years behind schedule, and programmes that have been installed by the regional monopoly suppliers BT, Fujitsu and Cerner routinely collapse. Even the help desk (run by Fujitsu) is, in the NAO's words, "universally poor". Much of the new software promised years ago hasn't even been developed yet and many experts wonder if it ever will be.

Still, the folly of handing the project to just four big suppliers (now down to three with the withdrawal of Accenture) has finally been realised. The agency running it, Connecting for Health (CfH), has belatedly allowed scores of other firms to supply IT to the NHS. Unfortunately they start with one arm tied behind their backs. For when an NHS trust does use one of these new firms, it has to pay out of its own budget, rather than have the new IT funded from CfH's central pot as happens when they choose the BT, Fujitsu or Cerner systems. It shows how pisspoor the centrally-negotiated IT products are that many trusts actually prefer to pay their own way rather than take what's on offer for "free".

When they do ignore the central contracts, however, taxpayers have to pay twice: once from the local NHS budget and again to compensate the big IT firm that has been shunned. Under this arrangement the big firms have so far been paid £37m for doing nothing.

The performance of BT, Fujitsu and Cerner has been so poor to date that simply paying them to bugger off for good might yet prove Health Secretary Alan Johnson's best chance of rescuing healthcare IT.

Smart move?

DESPITE the hugely expensive shambles that is Connecting for Health, NHS chief executive David Nicholson was keen to welcome personally the arrival in the NHS of a man from the private sector intimately acquainted with the IT cock-up.

Tim Smart, the new boss of King's College Hospital in London, excited Nicholson because he was the "first CEO [chief executive officer] from the private sector to move directly to a CEO role in an NHS foundation trust".

So what's Smart's track record in health? Er, he in fact comes from BT where he was president of BT Global Services UK, the department set up to win big consulting contracts – not least the ridiculous NHS national IT gig. As BT has boasted, Smart's "particular focus is on the flawless execution of large contracts, and he is most proud of the part that BT is playing in Connecting for Health, the World's largest civilian IT project. Having been instrumental in winning that business for BT, Tim is accountable to the BT Board and to the NHS for BT's performance".

BT might have done well out of NHS, supplying the "national data spine" for £889m and running Connecting for Health in London for an extra £1bn-plus, but the NHS has not been quite so lucky (see article above).BT is already years behind schedule on its contract.

OUTSOURCING

Heebie-GPs, cont.

ONE month into UnitedHealth's controversial new contract to run three GP practices in Camden, north London (see *Eye* 1208), there have already been complaints about the loss of two locum doctors in the area.

One had been working at the Camden Road surgery for 18 years; but, according to campaigners, her job was not protected by UnitedHealth's assurance that no permanent staff posts would be lost.

After both the locum and her patients protested, the doctor was reinstated for her usual thrice weekly sessions – but for only three months. Her salary is also now being paid directly by Camden primary care trust (PCT), and not by United, the British arm of America's biggest healthcare corporation. This means United can make even more profit as it has the doctor's services for free.

Meanwhile *Pulse*, the doctors' magazine, has found that United only won the contract by undercutting the bid of local GPs by 25 percent. The local bid, though dearer, scored significantly higher on service provision.

Jo Shaw, prospective Lib Dem parliamentary candidate for Holborn and St Pancras, said she was concerned that Camden PCT, which awarded the contract, may have lowered the qualifying criteria which allowed United to bid successfully. She is using Freedom of Information requests to try to find out more about the tender, but so far has been blocked by the usual "commercial confidentiality" secrecy tool.

The PCT, however, seems to have had to bow to patient pressure to a degree, delaying the tender for out-of-hours GP services in Islington, Hackney and City, Haringey and Camden. It will put the services out to tender in October, with the aim of having a deal done by November next year and a new service being in place by April 2010. Originally it was planning to offer the service, run for the past 10 years by Camidoc, a non-profit making group of local GPs, to outfits like UnitedHealth in the next few months.

The delay is presumably also partly due to the PCT weighing up the implications for local GPs (and patients) of having three new polyclinics or super GP surgeries in the area, including one to be based at the University College London Hospital and one at the Royal Free – handy for ensuring patients, and the money which now follows them, go to the hospital itself.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

38,000 Patients whose medical records are missing on disc, lost by courier company in last two months

54,000 Patients who turned up to outpatient appointments with hospitals unable to find their medical records in last two years

HMRC HOSPITALITY

Guess who's paying for dinner

HOW to get a free dinner off the taxman? Try to avoid paying millions of pounds in tax first, seems to be the answer.

The last *Eye* revealed how bosses of some of Britain's biggest companies were being wined and dined by Dave Hartnett, acting chairman of Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs, at the Westminster restaurant Shepherds to "give them an opportunity to share with us their views on the delivery of the UK tax system".

Some of the very same firms, the *Eye* has now learnt, were simultaneously being labelled by HMRC as the biggest tax dodgers in the country.

National Grid and BT, whose finance directors Steve Lucas and Hanif Lalani were lavishly schmoozed at Shepherds courtesy of the taxpayer, were both targeted under HMRC's "high risk corporate" project. This was originally launched as the "serial [tax] avoiders" project but the name was later watered down to "corporate avoiders" and then to "high risk corporates" as the original terms were thought too "pejorative" by the business-friendly tax bosses.

Other companies targeted under the scheme, under which HMRC's best tax experts focus intensely on them, have included Barclays, Citibank, Lloyds TSB, Swiss Re, Hanson and Daily Mail and General Trust (whose papers aren't too forgiving of anybody else "cheating the system").

A few weeks ago a parliamentary committee heard that HMRC's softly-softly approach was predicated on the assumption that "the majority of businesses want to pay the right amount of tax at the right time" – an impression Mr Hartnett is keen to cultivate. That his own organization should label so many companies from the upper reaches of the FTSE 100 "serial avoiders" suggests the truth is somewhat different.

Benefit fraud?

THOSE dinners, meanwhile, are causing red faces at HMRC HQ, and not just because of the £25 worth of drink guzzled by each diner.

The department has admitted that the £80 freebies its chairman and directors received each time they took a captain of industry out were not entered as benefits on their tax returns. A spokesman claimed the schmoozing escapes tax as "required for genuine business reasons to entertain customers, suppliers or other business connections in the course of his or her duties" – shorthand for the legal requirement that it was "wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of their duties".

In fact the HMRC directors were explicitly *not* "required" to go to Shepherds in order to do their jobs. In his invitation their boss Dave Hartnett said "this is not a 'three line whip' event and those with family and other commitments should not in any sense feel obliged to attend". His enticement that "you are able to choose from the *à la carte* menu" proved too tempting, however, and almost all trotted along.

Confronted with the voluntary nature of the event, HMRC changed its tune. Now the directors were simply "fulfilling their employment duties in attending the function..."

Faced with an identical situation elsewhere, tax inspectors the *Eye* has spoken to confirm they would tax the benefit. But it seems there's one rule for those running the tax department and another for everybody else. Any spirited official who now wants to investigate the bosses – including the man who has recently become head of the Serious Fraud Office, Richard Alderman – might ask the "compliance" director for help. As one of the troughers she should know who had what off the *à la carte*.

In the City

ONE OF the more aggressive players in the sub-prime mortgage market has put money into running the private office of the Tories' housing spokesman.

The money came from online mortgage provider edeus creators – part of the edeus group established two years ago and backed by a major US sub-prime player, investment banker Merrill Lynch.

Edeus was launched in late 2006 and within a year became one of the top 15 UK mortgage lenders. However, its timing was badly wrong, as the sub-prime boom had peaked and within a year had turned to bust. Earlier this month edeus closed to new mortgage business and sacked half its staff.

Edeus creators gave an unspecified amount at a date as yet unknown to Tory Party Central Office, suggesting this money be allocated to the running costs of the Shadow Housing Minister. This role was carried out first by Michael Gove and then by Grant Shapps. The amount, between £1,000 and £5,000, was allocated as requested in July 2007 and its existence was revealed in a report by the parliamentary commissioner for standards, John Lyon, earlier this month.

That the Conservatives would accept money from a company so closely linked to the much-criticised sub-prime lending business will hardly help the party's image – especially as sub-prime borrowers are expected to be among the majority of the growing number of those losing their homes through repossession, often due to an innate inability to afford their too expensive home loans.

Edeus creators is part of the edeus europe group, which in turn is owned from Luxembourg by a venture capital group, Oakwood Financial Fund (now Oakwood Global Finance). Oakwood is 45 percent owned by Merrill Lynch and another 45 percent by Italian investment company CIR.

Merrills had already bought its way into the booming UK sub-prime business with Mortgages PLC and Freedom Funding. It has announced sub-prime-related losses in the US of more than $31bn.

Edeus (the e is for online and the rest Latin for creator!) was set up to originate, package and securitise/sell sub-prime, buy-to-let and other specialised loans. Although it was late in the game, edeus in many ways epitomised the business model that spread the sub-prime virus around the globe, creating total losses that may go beyond $500bn.

Oakwood and its investors were backing a team headed by Michael Bolton, who had formerly run BM Solutions, the specialised lending arm of Birmingham Midshires – owned by HBOS. The company boasted of its hi-tech online marketing techniques and totally automated processing of loans, while it was big on self-certification by borrowers – one of the biggest flaws in the regulation of sub-prime lending. But then, as a broker/originator of loans that were to be sold on, this was perhaps of less concern than the fees such loans generated.

In its first three months to end-December 2006, edeus wrote £350m-worth of mortgage business. Lending for the full year to end 2007 is not yet known. But Bolton talked optimistically last year about selling on the loans from a pipeline created with the aid of £1.2bn in finance. The usual customers were building societies.

However, the edeus creators accounts for December 2006, only signed off at the end of February this year, paint a grim picture due to the "deep turmoil in global credit and liquidity markets". The company reported that its two main funding facilities were due to be renegotiated next month and in October and there was "significant risk" they would be renewed on worse commercial terms "if the banks choose to renew them at all". Furthermore, the market for securitising mortgages was effectively closed, leaving it stuck with its pipeline.

Oakwood had already been forced to twice inject more capital and seek further backing from the edeus lenders. Its main lender was Merrill Lynch but a charge was filed in February by Deutsche Bank.

Edeus was looking for a new partner to bring in finance at the time of the accounts being signed off – but no announcement has since been made of a saviour. So it revised the business model, moving to an "originate to order" policy of only selling mortgages that others will buy. That would greatly reduce its need for finance.

The company is forecasting losses this year – it lost almost £10m in its first year – and an uncertain future, which explains this month's redundancies and why many of its lending policies, such as self-certification and high loan-to-value ratios, have changed.

All of which suggests why edeus creators and its directors could figure a bit of help from the likely next government might come in handy – assuming it lasts that long. Five edeus europe directors, including Oakwood founder Mike Culhane, resigned earlier this month. But whether it is the type of money the caring Cameroonians should be accepting is another matter.

MERRILL Lynch is not the only Wall Street bank to be suffering from overactive greedy glands in the UK sub-prime market. Lehman Brothers has announced that it is pulling back from some of its UK sub-prime lending.

Lehman was, like Merrills, a big player in the originate-and-distribute business for UK sub-prime mortgages. At November 2005, their two main sub-prime lending arms, Southern Pacific Mortgage and Preferred Mortgages, had securitised mortgages worth more than £4.5bn. The bank has, however, not taken the big US hits that have shredded its rivals' balance sheets.

Just how bad Lehman's experience has been cannot yet be judged because both Southern Pacific Mortgage and Preferred Mortgages have still not filed their accounts for the period since November 2005. The 2006 accounts were due in September last year – this is a criminal offence. With a prestigious Wall Street name treating UK law with such contempt, perhaps Companies House will make an example and prosecute…

FURTHER embarrassment for the SFO followed the smart piece of showbiz executed by the US Justice Department in stopping and subpoenaing BAE Systems chief executive Mike Turner on his arrival in Houston earlier this month. Simultaneous raids were carried out on the US homes of several BAE executives. The activity was related to the continuing American investigation into corruption surrounding the Saudi Al-Yamamah contract – an investigation dropped by the SFO under pressure from Tony Blair and the Saudis.

The subpoenas mean that Turner and colleagues will now have to provide documents and testimony or be held in contempt. That would put a severe dent in BAE's ability to conduct business in the US, increasingly a major market for it.

The subpoenas and raids are also likely to concentrate BAE's mind on how it can extricate itself from the closing DoJ net and avoid prosecution. That thought process is likely to add to pressure on BAE to do a deal for a deferred prosecution arrangement – under which it agrees to wrongdoing, pays a big fine and agrees to monitoring by the DoJ in return for avoiding a trial.

The US prosecutors' action also clearly sends a message to the British government, which has tried to handicap any US case by not collaborating and sharing the evidence collected by the SFO. The DoJ had already shown it could get round that roadblock, by flying witnesses to the US.

The American action will also further undermine the SFO/government position when it appeals the High Court ruling that they were wrong to cave in to Saudi threats of non-cooperation against terrorism and drop the corruption case. The Americans are the Saudis' most powerful ally and sell them large amounts of weapons but that has not stopped the DoJ. So why, the Law Lords might ask in July, should Saudi pressure stop the SFO doing its duty and Britain breaking an international agreement against corruption?

Well, the loss of the £20bn Typhoon contract for starters.

ONCE again the Fundamentally Supine Authority declares it is going to get tough on insider dealing, which it is shocked, shocked to discover still occurs ahead of a quarter of all City deals. So far it has managed one as yet incomplete prosecution on a deal everybody had forgotten about involving two people nobody had ever heard of.

So how will things change? Well the FSA – while it is waiting for US-style plea bargains – might start by studying some research carried out by three European business school academics entitled "The Dark Role of Investment Banks in the Market for Corporate Control". The authors – Andriy Bodnaruk, Massimo Massa and Andrei Simonov – studied more than 1,600 US deals between 1984 and 2003.

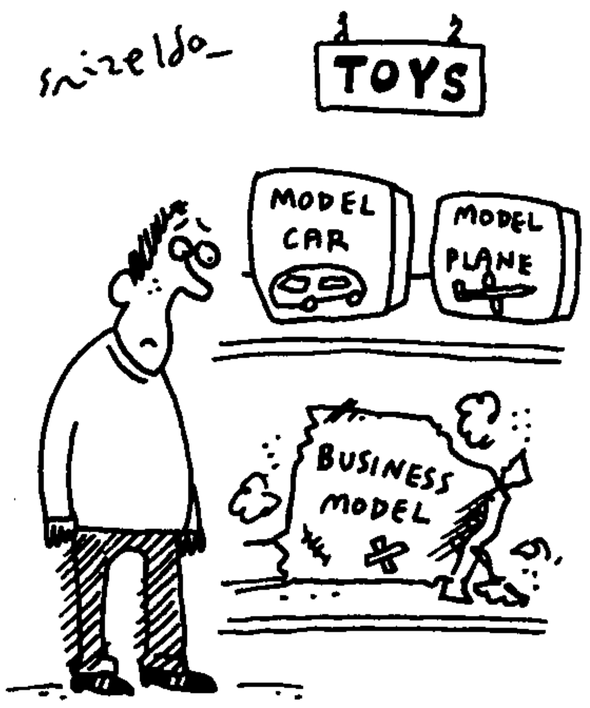
Guess what? They found that large investment banks serving as lead advisers bought shares in the target company in over 19 percent of cases during the quarter before the deal was announced. This compared with 10 percent for banks not serving in a lead or any role. Insider banks bought shares for a first time in 8 percent of cases and increased an existing stake by 25 percent or more in 11 percent of cases; both figures were double those for non-insider banks. The academics only concentrated on share purchases they considered significant and ignored many others that might have had a nefarious explanation.

An important point here is that any buying at the early stages of bid talks, or even before the

target knows it is a target, is likely to escape insider dealing investigations, which tend to concentrate on the run-ups in a share price during the days before an announcement. And even these still do not produce prosecutions.

Doubtless the great and good of the City will insist this was just coincidence.

But then where do all these leaks come from, if not from the advisers and their friends and associates? Perhaps the FSA should commission some research on UK deals to see what share purchase patterns this discloses.



PLANET FOOTBALL
Portsmouth

THE FA Cup winners may not yet be in the generosity league of Champions League final losers Chelsea when it comes to the support from their owners, but young master Alexandre Gaydamak and/or his friends and family (billionaire father Arkadi owns an Israeli club) have certainly been digging deep into their bank accounts.

The latest accounts for Miland Development (2004), the company that owns Portsmouth FC, show that as at May 2007 it and the club had bank loans of more than £18.5m and almost £24m of "other loans" – presumed to be from the owner. Gaydamak bought out Milan Mandaric in December 2006. The "other loans" to Miland increased by £10.5m.

Group bank loans – including loans due after more than a year – totalling £19m have since been rolled into new facilities which are repayable in August this year, secured on "Premier League receivables". Bank loans at the club increased by £11m during the year to £18.6m, while "other loans" went up by a mere £1m to £13m. The club repaid £7.5m during the year, largely by increasing its borrowing by £19m.

Portsmouth banked with Barclays before the arrival of Gaydamak, and it has since negotiated facilities with the Icelandic-owned Singer & Friedlander and the South African Standard Bank.

As with Roman Abramovich's largesse at Chelsea and Mohamed Fayed at Fulham, the bulk of the £24m in "other loans" is unsecured, interest-free and repayable in more than a year. However, one unsecured £2.7m loan to the club, due at an unspecified future date, accrues interest at a modest 15 percent. Hardly generous.

Just how much of the £24m comes from Gaydamak – who controls Miland and the club through a British Virgin Island company, Devondale Investments – is not made clear. But the Miland accounts contain a statement that he has given written indications that funding will remain in place "for the foreseeable future". This followed a 2007 loss of £23.5m by the club. On that assurance, the accounts were prepared on a "going concern" basis by new auditors Grant Thornton, who replaced Menzies last year.

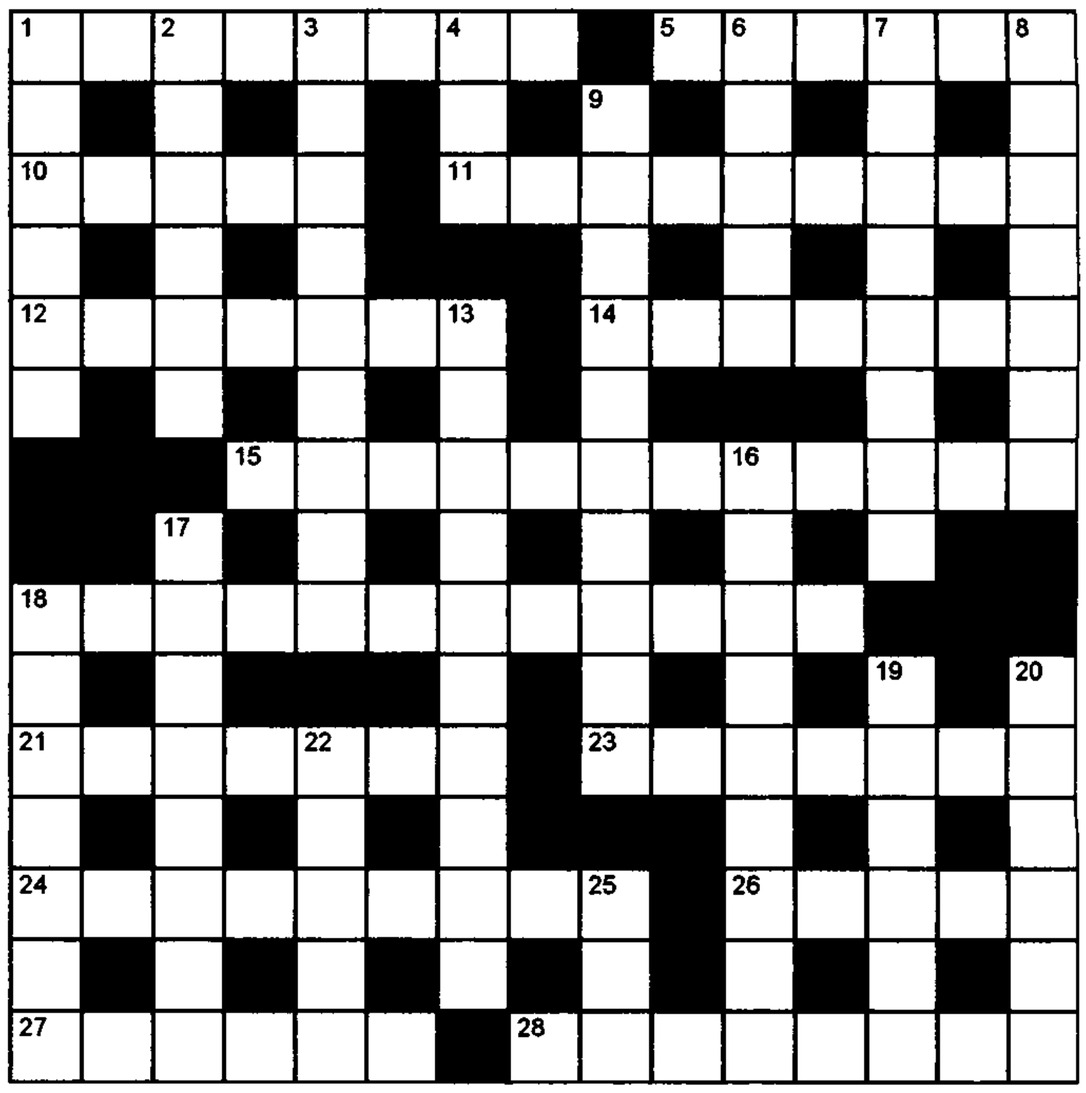
Further financing has most certainly been required during the Cup-winning season as 2006-07 club revenues are at £40m compared with a wage bill alone of £32m. Gaydamak, who previously denied rumours that he was looking to sell, will be looking to the new stadium and any redevelopment profits for his financial reward.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 366
by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 6 June 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Primate's over-familiar addressing of the President? (4,4)
5 He's fit (unusual for a sex object) (6)
10 See 16dn.
11 Brown would like to be let off with decree (2-7)
12 English place to engage in beastly sex? Get off! (7)
14 Pretend medicine is to fix stinking problem (7)
15 Supporting computers, etc. like a comic desperate for a one-night stand? (7,3,2)
18 Addictive behaviour that gets up the nose? (4,8)
21 Penis possibly extended by capless biro – it's grown, naturally (7)
23 African place forms line, pressing to shag boyfriend's head off (7)
24 Second west London area to cause a stink (crooked) (4-5)
26 Mockery of press at Tory's end (5)
27 Yes-s, drunken guards pisspot imperial soldiers (6)
28 *Organ Craft* puts emphasis on viewers (8)

DOWN

1 Writer loosened bra (it could help you achieve a rise) (6)
2 Unpleasant, being the source of an obnoxious leak (6)
3 Dicky Yates (Lab) ropes Right in for back-stabbings (9)
4/25 Vomit put one off regular boozer (6)
6 Forced evacuation east, the last word in retreat (5)
7 Tory in, eh? (Corrupt, it can be assumed) (2,6)
8 Den Skinner's thing (openly gay) (7)
9 Monarch taking piss over Paddy exercising (7,3)
13 Chow that's gobbled by chow? (3,7)
16/10 Economic power? Sarkozy's end calculation scuppered (9,5)
17 Horseshit collection from Brown: *The Man Entering the Breach* (4-4)
18 Force knocks up bitches (7)
19 Renounce the Spencer family? (6)
20 Fervent plea from Rex, hugged by settler (6)
22 Old-fashioned twit takes wife for Labour's leader (only just) (5)
25 See 4dn.

Crossword 365 winner: RICHARD GEORGE

ACROSS: 6 Noah 7 Colostomy 11 Iago 13 Government 15 Tremor 17 Cohort 20 Adam and Eve 23/12 Once-over 24 Cowpuncher 25 Brassiere 26 Berk.

DOWN: 1 In clover 2 Labour 3 Concave 4/22A Dogsbody 5 Imogen 8 Triumph 9 Hanger-on 14 Racked up 16/10 Members Allowances 18 Rednecks 19 Network 21 Donors 22 Bucket 24 Chit.

HUSBAND

oh no... where am I?... oh my bleedin' head. I need some aspirins, where's my bag?
I wouldn't do that
Aye, why not?
'cause you spewed up into it, last night
oh no... oooooh

OFFSET
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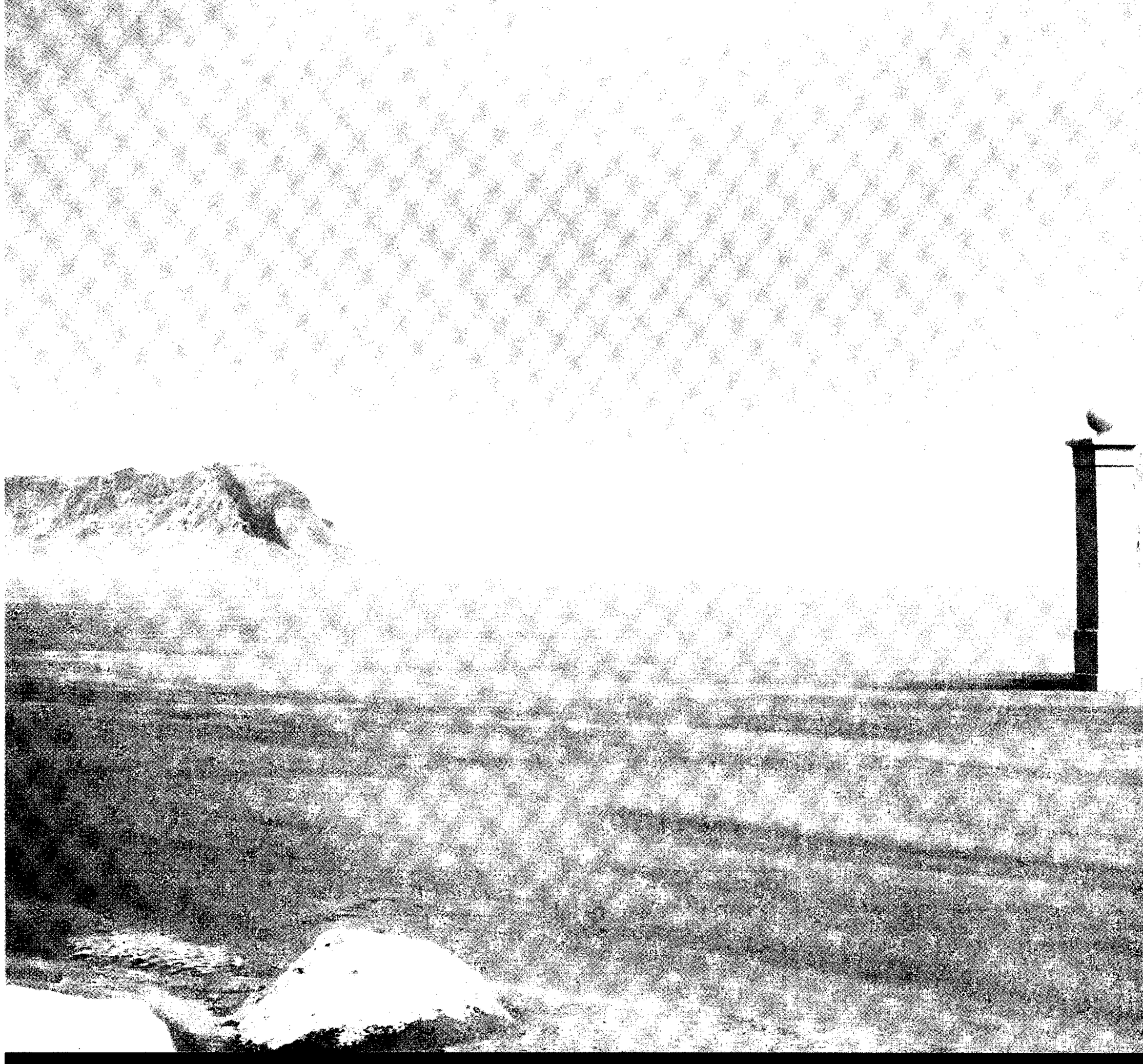

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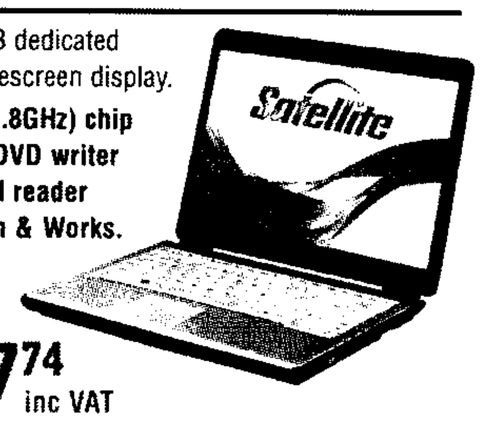

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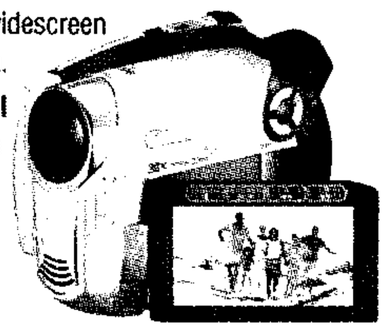

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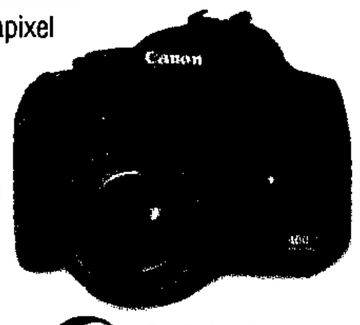

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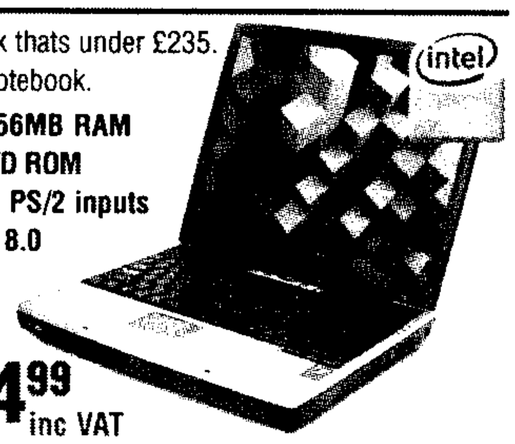

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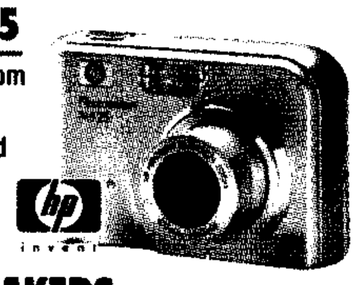

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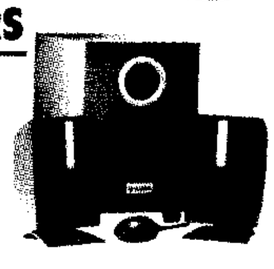

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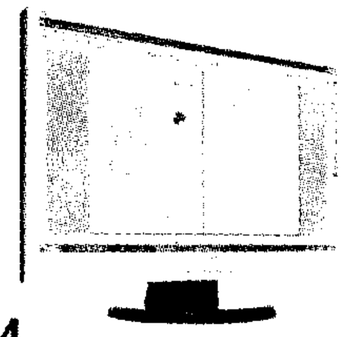

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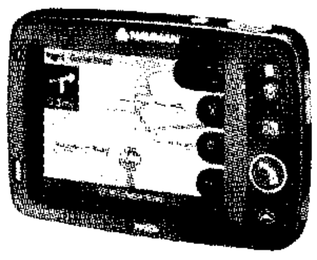

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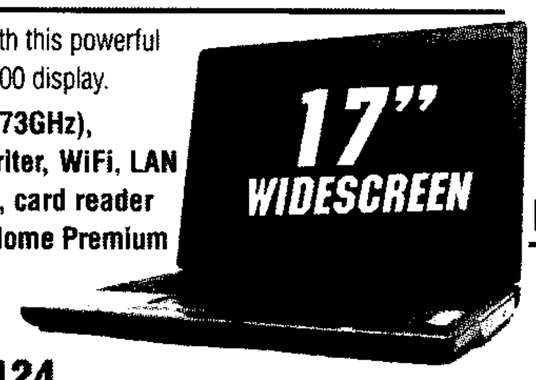

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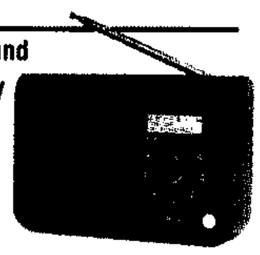

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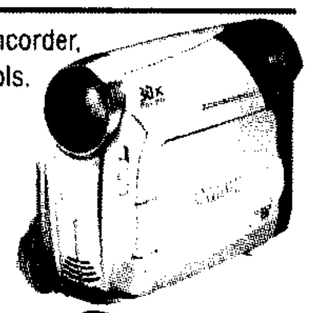

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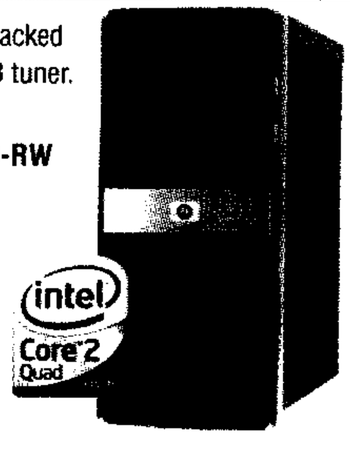

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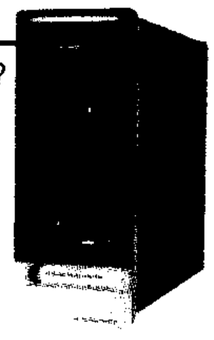

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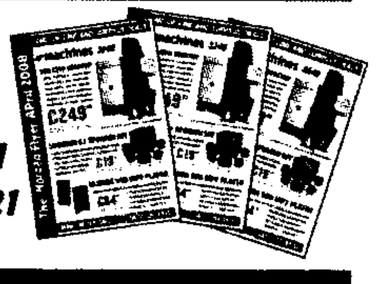

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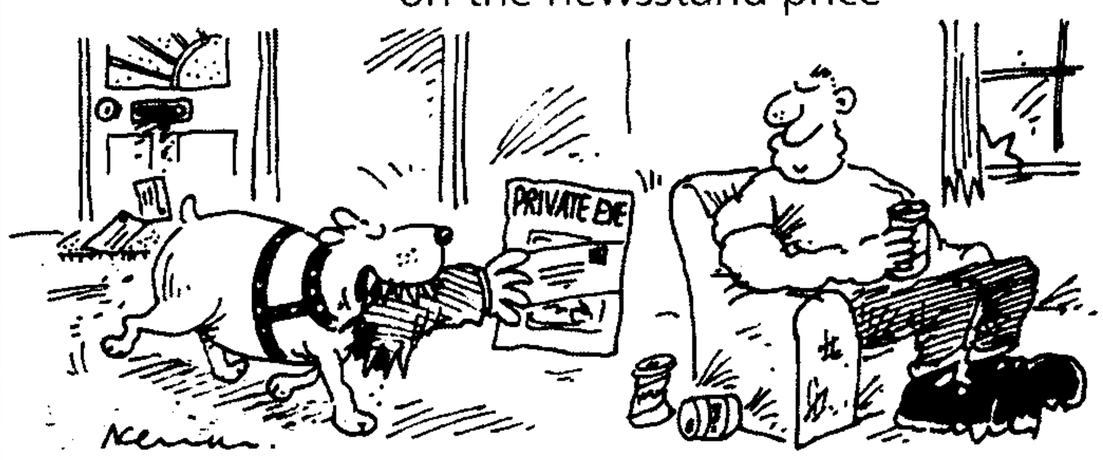

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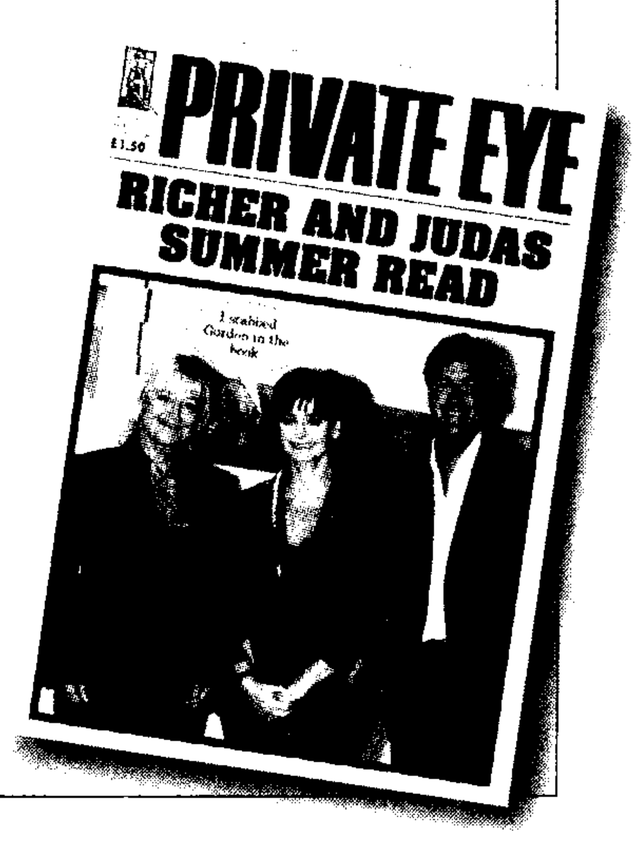

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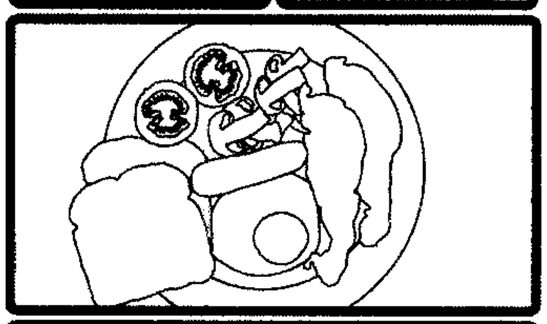

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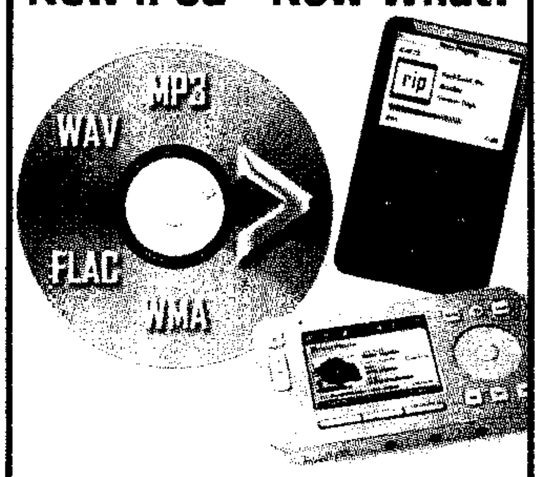

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OM SAI RAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit

A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off-the-peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that - a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up - he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more. 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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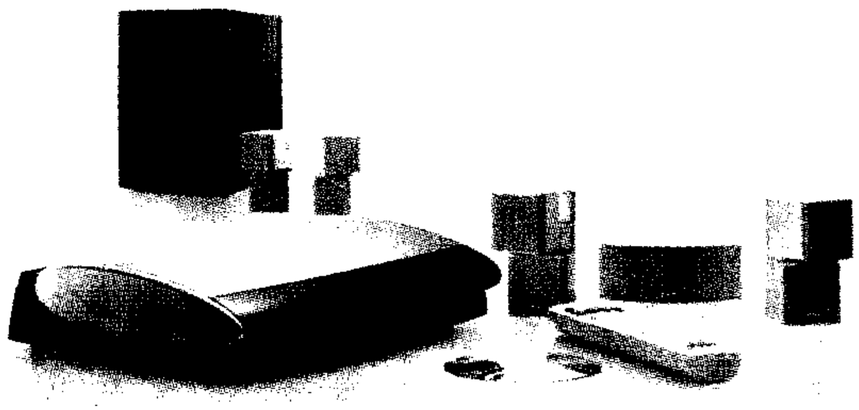

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